

NIKOLAI OSTROVSKY

HAIL, LIFE!

Articles

Speeches

Letters

197

014



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow



H. Scipio Palley

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY HELEN ALTSCHULER

DESIGNED BY M. SEREGIN



Foreword

NIKOLAI OSTROVSKY

It is a glorious memory that Nikolai Alexeyevich Ostrovsky, writer, has left behind him. To millions of people the world over, men, women, and children of every race and nationality, that dark-eyed Russian lad, Pavel Korchagin—hero of Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*—has become a lifetime friend, a comrade whose will and courage, whose unconquerable love of life, whose staunch persistence in the face of hardships and difficulties serve as a lofty and inspiring example.

"The most wonderful thing a man could wish," Ostrovsky wrote, "is that his works may continue to serve mankind even when he himself has ceased to exist." And, by the life he lived and the work he did, Ostrovsky earned himself this coveted destiny.

Imagine for a moment that Time has turned back its pages—that Ostrovsky is still alive. You are in the year 1935. The month is December. *How the Steel Was Tempered* has been published, and the Soviet people acclaims the selfless labour of one of its loyal and gifted sons. Ostrovsky has been decorated with the Order of Lenin. And now he has come to Moscow, from Sochi, to continue his work on a new book—*Born of the Storm*. You go to visit him in his rooms, at No. 40, Gorky Street.

Tense with expectation, you climb the broad staircase to the second floor, turn down the hallway, and press the bell. The door is opened. Then another door. And you are in his room.

There he lies before you—a gaunt figure, under a blanket drawn up to the waist. His thin, sensitive face—the face of one much given to thought, to concentrated mental effort—is literally alight with inspiration. It reflects as in a mirror every turn and leap in

the thoughts that occupy his mind. The forehead is high and prominent. Over the right eyebrow there is a little hollow—the mark of a wound received many years past. The deep-sunk eyes are wide open. They seem to see.

He wears a khaki tunic. The Order of Lenin gleams on his chest.

The room is sunk in semi-darkness; for the huge window is hung with heavy drapery, to deaden the sounds of the street.

On the wall to the left, over the bed, hangs a portrait of Lenin. There is a desk in the right-hand corner, and on the wall above it a portrait of Stalin. A leather couch stands in the room, a piano, a book-case. A bust of Henri Barbusse.

But you have no more time for observation. Your host, warned of your coming, is speaking to you. His voice is youthful and energetic. He asks you to sit down beside him, and offers you his left hand. His hands alone, of all his body, retain some remnant of mobility. He presses your hand in greeting, and keeps it in his all through your talk with him.

And you divine, by his firm clasp, by the nervous pressure of his fingers as you talk, that this contact illuminates you, as it were, for his mental vision, helps him to form an idea of what you may be like.

"When I hold your hand," he says, as though to confirm your surmise, "I seem to get a better understanding of what you say. I can imagine you more vividly, and that helps me greatly."

But as the talk goes on, you begin to forget that this man lying before you is blind and ill.

"The impression Ostrovsky made on me," wrote one of his friends, Maté Zalka, "was one of the sharpest contrasts. But, above all, it was cheering, heartening. All this business of his lying flat on his back, bedridden, blind, and all the rest—that's only on the surface. In real truth he is strong, courageous, a fighter. Yes, he still bears himself like a Red Army man. He feels that he marches in the ranks. And he is truly in the ranks, yes, in the very fore. This physical state of his—it seems trifling, incidental: a little sad, perhaps, but not permanent, not inconquerable, not by any means final."

True, very true! Sitting there beside him, listening to his inspired talk, following his swift, eager flights of thought, you quickly forget that you are at a sick-bed. "When I shut my eyes," he says—and you do not think of the fact that his eyes have been blind for many

years past. He speaks of "this confounded 'flu"—and you have the feeling that that is all that ails him. "I read," he says; "I write"; "I'm planning to go"; "I shall have to search in the archives"; "I'm preparing to speak at the congress." Blind physically, he is keener of sight than many who can see. Constantly suffering, ill beyond all hope of cure, he radiates such energy and human warmth that you begin to feel—not pity for him, no!—but a vast pride in him. Shame overwhelms you at the thought of your own occasional moments of sluggishness, at the thought of things that you have left undone—today, perhaps, and yesterday, and the day before.

"It's not illness," he says to you, "that's a man's worst enemy. Blindness is an appalling thing; but even blindness can be conquered. There's another thing that's far more dangerous: laziness. Plain, human laziness. Yes, when a man no longer feels the urge, the need to work; when his heart is empty; when, lying down to sleep at night, he can find no answer to the question, 'What have I accomplished in the day just ended?'—that's the fearful thing. That's the dangerous thing. That's when his friends should gather in consultation, to seek ways of saving him—for he is near disaster. Whereas, once a man retains his urge to work, and keeps on working, come what may, regardless of all obstacles and difficulties—that man is a normal working man, and all is well with him."

And he goes on, with increasing warmth:

"You know—I can tell you this secret: men are sometimes pretty useless and pernicious creatures. A man becomes really a man when he has some great ideal to live for. Then he stops living by parts—belly, liver, and all the rest—and begins to live as one whole. That, if you get down to it, is what distinguishes man from other creatures. That is what constitutes man's might. And there is one great ideal that can transform not only individuals, but whole nations into heroes: Communism, the struggle for the people's happiness. I am proud to be a Bolshevik, a member of the Communist Party. As such, I am a man, and I can live as man should. And I can say, not for effect but as the deepest truth: I am a happy man."

Yes, Ostrovsky was happy. There was no gap between his words and his actions. The better you came to know him, the more clearly this impressed itself upon you.

Nikolai Ostrovsky was born September 29, 1904. His father, a brewery worker, did not earn enough to support the family, and the mother was compelled to work out as a cook. When Nikolai was twelve he, too, went to work, as a kitchen boy. Later, he worked as a stoker's helper, and after that—as an electrician's apprentice. In 1919 he joined the Young Communist League and went to the front as a volunteer. From that time on his life was inseparably bound up with the great work of the Party.

And so, as a boy of fifteen Ostrovsky fought in the Civil War, under Kotovsky and Budyonny. Then, in the years of peaceful construction, he worked heroically—rebuilding the railway shops, laying a railway spur line, floating timber. Later, as a Young Communist League functionary—first in the Berezdov, then in the Izyaslavl, District—he brought all his native enthusiasm into this work as well. "If you don't blaze, you go to waste in smoke," he said. "That is always true. Hail, the flame of life!" And he devoted himself with all the fervour of his youthful soul to whatever work the Party and the League assigned him.

Towards the end of 1924 Ostrovsky fell seriously ill. The trouble centred in his spine. All that he had been through in his young life—the deprivations of childhood, the war wounds, the post-war years of intense, unflagging labour, without rest or sleep—now helped to down him.

Accustomed always to active struggle, to active building of the new life, he was now swept back to the "hindmost lines." From border to border, the vast Soviet land was seized with the mighty fervour of construction. Those were the years of preparation for the great leap forward of the first five-year plan. Industry and agriculture were being reorganized, reconstructed. A cultural revolution was in process. Building work of a scope unparalleled in history had rallied the youth, Ostrovsky's own generation, to joyous, untiring labour.

The more deeply, then, did he suffer at his enforced inactivity.

The Motherland came to his aid. He was sent for treatment to the country's finest clinics and sanatoriums: Kharkov, Yevpatoria, Slavyansk, Moscow, Sochi. For his own part, too, he did everything in his power to get back to the ranks.

"He took the liveliest interest in every development of life outside the clinic walls. Read extensively, and organized newspaper readings and discussions on political themes and on current events

among his fellow-patients. A staunch fighter, a Communist, he knew his goal, knew what he had to fight for.... Confronted by his personality, illness seemed to shrink into unimportance, to fade into the background"—such was Ostrovsky in the eyes of Nurse Anna Pavlovna Davidova, at the clinic of the Kharkov Medico-Mechanical Research Institute. Such was Ostrovsky to all who knew him in those years—from the youngest of Young Communist League members to the elder generation of Communists; such he was to his good friends Innokenti Pavlovich Fedenev, Khrisanf Pavlovich Chernokozov, Alexandra Alexeyevna Zhigareva, who more than once came to his aid in days of difficulty.

"Something to live for—the knowledge that I'm needed"—this unfailing thought gave Ostrovsky the power to bear, to overcome his physical suffering.

These years brought out with particular clarity Ostrovsky's strength of spirit, his tremendous self-command, his power of will and steadfastness of purpose. The more difficult things became for him, the more determinedly did he fight on to attain the aim he had set himself: return to the ranks.

He entered the Sverdlov Communist University in Moscow, as a correspondence student, and plunged into a study of the Marxist-Leninist classics.

A tiny crystal set was of great help to him. Lectures on the subjects he was studying were broadcast regularly, and he never failed to listen in.

Comrades from the local library kept him supplied with books, newspapers, and magazines.

"I would bring him books, books, books—no end of books—great piles of books, tied together with string," recalls Dmitri Pavlovich Khoruzhenko, then manager of the port library in Novorossiisk. "And this extraordinary subscriber swallowed them all with amazing speed. At first I would register everything I took him in his subscription book. But I had to keep gluing extra pages in, and it began to get messy. Then, in violation of all library rules and regulations, I began registering only the total number of books issued to him, without particulars. I would bring him books straight from the shop, even before they were entered in the library lists, so that he could choose for himself."

To books, as to people, Ostrovsky's reaction was that of the fighter, interested, active.

He was always particularly drawn to Maxim Gorky.

"How wonderfully written!" he said of Gorky's *Falcon*. "Why—it's the song of winged youth, brimming over with confidence in its power to achieve, aspiring eagerly to bring about the brightest dreams of liberty, of a life of beauty. It's a veritable grenade, cast by the mighty arm of a giant fighter into the camp of obscurantism and philistinism.... Yes, Gorky is the first. None wrote so before him."

Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Nekrasov, Tolstoi, Chekhov, Korolenko, Serafimovich, Furmanov, Sholokhov, Fadeyev, Novikov-Priboi, Fedin, Balzac, Victor Hugo, Zola, Jack London, Dreiser, Kellermann, Barbusse—these, and many, many others, were read and reread by Ostrovsky in this period.

He made a careful study, in particular, of literature devoted to the Civil War—fiction, journalism, documents, memoirs, collected in symposium form or published in scattered bits in periodicals.

His day was carefully planned out, with definite hours assigned for reading of political literature; fiction; study; letter writing. At first this schedule included daily walks. Later, the walks had to be left out. They had become a physical impossibility. A special heading in the schedule provided for "Lost Time"—time spent on breakfast, dinner, supper, on rest without books, and the like.

This was no mere "clinging" to life. Ostrovsky—as he was later to put it—had "mapped out his road in life," deep in his heart. He knew his goal. He had chosen his place in the ranks.

It was in this period, evidently, that the decision to make a try at writing took shape.

In a letter to Pyotr Nikolayevich Novikov written from Novorossiisk in 1927, Ostrovsky remarked that he was "thinking of writing—some sort of 'historico-lyrico-heroical tale.' Really, though, joking aside, I'm thinking seriously of writing. Only I don't know what will come of it."

What he had in mind was a story about those heroes of the Civil War—Kotovsky and his brigade. He began this story in the autumn of 1927, and finished it early in 1928.

A new heading—"Writing"—appeared in his daily schedule, crowding out many of his former interests. As soon as breakfast was over, he would pull a thick note-book out from under his pillow and set to work. At times he would be so absorbed that it was no easy task to make him put his work away and eat his dinner. He would demand irritably that people stop pestering him about

"idiotic dinners"; or promise that in a few days—just as soon as he could finish—he would eat all the dinners they wanted, at one go.

When the story was finished it was sent off to Odessa, to Ostrovsky's old Army comrades. Some two weeks later, their answer came—a collective letter, approving the work as a whole and advising certain changes of detail. Ostrovsky was overjoyed.

But the manuscript was lost in the mails on its way back from Odessa; and no second copy existed. The story was gone. "It was a long time," writes Ostrovsky's wife, "before Nikolai could reconcile himself to this loss." His first outburst of pain and indignation, however, was very brief. He took himself firmly in hand; and there was no further reference to this heavy blow, either in his letters or in conversation with family and friends.

His comrades' approval of his first effort buoyed up Ostrovsky's faith in his abilities. He renewed his studies, seeking to master the laws of his new field of work. And, deep in his mind, he began to plan a new book.

At a time when his life seemed to have reached its limit; when blindness joined with immobility to make the end of everything seem near at hand, Ostrovsky wrote to Pyotr Nikolayevich Novikov, from Sochi (September 11, 1930):

"I've thought up a plan to fill my life with real content—the only thing that can justify the very fact of life. It's a difficult thing, this plan of mine, and very far from simple. If I can manage to get it going, I'll write you more about it. In any case, there's nothing unplanned about my course in life. I keep a straight course, with no loops or zigzags about it. I know just where I stand, and so far there's no need to be jumpy. I organically detest and despise the sort of people that begin to whine and get hysterical when life hits mercilessly out at them."

"I may be tied to my bed today, but that doesn't mean you can call me a sick man. That's all wrong, all silly nonsense! I'm perfectly healthy. What if my legs can't move, and I can't see a thing? That's a pure misunderstanding—an idiotic, devilish joke."

What amazing, what incredible power of will! A challenge cast into the face of Death at what seemed the very moment of its triumph!

The doctors were powerless. They could not halt the process of destruction which had seized upon his body. Never again was he to get up out of his bed, to see, to walk. Well—and what of that?

He had found the way out. He would stride forward into life from the pages of his book!

He knew well, had long known, what he wanted to set down. It was to be a book for the younger generation: the story of a fighter of the Revolution, whom no trials, no difficulties had been able to daunt. Yes, his own story, told for the youth, in the hope that this "worker lad I knew"—Pavel Korchagin—might rally his readers to fight as he had fought.

Looking into the pages from his manuscripts on display at the Ostrovsky memorial museums (in Moscow, Sochi, and Shepetovka), one begins to realize the labour his book cost him.

At first, he had no one at all to help him. His wife was busy all day, at work and in public activities, and in the evenings she was always very tired. And so he lay there, gripping a pencil in stiff, almost unbending fingers, writing—or rather, drawing—letter by painful letter. Often, a line would turn up over the preceding line, and both would be lost.

Then an instrument was devised to help him.

It was a simple contrivance enough. An ordinary cardboard folder, with parallel slits, some 8 millimetres high, cut out across the upper lid. The slits served to guide the pencil, so that each written line came out straight and distinct.

Most of Ostrovsky's writing, at this period, was done at night, when everyone was asleep. Before going to bed his wife or mother would put some 25 to 30 sheets of paper into his folder, and sharpen him several pencils. When morning came there was seldom a sheet of paper left unused. During the day the night's work would be carefully deciphered and copied out, by family and friends.

"A blazing torch of activity," Romain Rolland called Ostrovsky. Yes; and the stronger the bitter winds that tried to blow out this torch, the brighter, the fiercer burnt its flame.

Ostrovsky wrote two books of his autobiographical novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, and hoped ("by all means") to write a third, *Korchagin's Happiness* (about the happiness life had brought him, unrelated in the first two books). He completed the first volume of another novel, *Born of the Storm*—completed it, literally, only a few days before his death; and planned two more volumes to finish it ("not simply to get the book written, but to set it ablaze with the fire of my own heart"). Jointly with a young scenarist, he wrote the script for a film of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. He planned a

book for children, to be called *Pavka's Childhood* (that "I must get written"); a book about Budyonny, a volume of humorous tales.

And then—his articles, his speeches at Young Communist League congresses, at writers' conferences. The daily reading of newspapers, magazines, books. The "endless rush of people" in his rooms: writers, actors, librarians, famed collective farm women, Young Communist League members from Leningrad, fellow townsmen from Shepetovka. He made telephone calls; listened in to radio broadcasts, answered the letters pouring in from his numerous correspondents. He was always glad of an opportunity to help anyone, in any way he could.

All this gave him a feeling of the fulness of life—the joyous feeling that he was working like everybody else, marching in the ranks.

He lived his life *responsibly*.

"I know I won't last very long," he wrote. "There's a fire inside me, eating me away, and it takes all my power of will to keep it under control. For the time being, I'm managing to do that. But I must make the best of this respite Nature has given me, and write all that I can write for our people before it ends. My time is short.... I must make haste."

In November 1936 an extended plenary meeting of the presidium of the board of the Soviet Writers' Union, jointly with the Central Committee of the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union, was held in Ostrovsky's rooms in Moscow to discuss the manuscript of his new work—the first volume of *Born of the Storm*. After the discussion Ostrovsky expressed his heartfelt thanks for the friendly criticism expressed, and promised, after one day's rest ("I shall permit myself that luxury"), to set to work again on the final preparation of the manuscript for press. It was a good three months' work, for any healthy man; but Ostrovsky undertook to do it in one month.

"I suffer with insomnia," he explained, "and that will help. Some treat their illnesses by rest, others—by work."

And so he proceeded to do: "treating" his illness by work, from nine o'clock in the morning to ten, eleven, sometimes even twelve at night, with only a few short breaks in the course of the day.

His family watched with deep alarm. He was spending, literally, his last reserves of energy. They begged him to rest, to put off his work, if only for the shortest time. But he would hear of no delay.

Mercilessly, he drove himself and all his "staff," as he called his assistants.

On the table by his bed, on the chairs, on the couch, lay copies of the manuscript, each marked with the comments of the editor who had worked over it.

Page by page, the work proceeded. First the author's text would be read, then all the comments to the given page, from every copy. Weighing every word and sentence in his mind, Ostrovsky would alter, add, delete, establishing the final text of his novel. And, decision taken, he would hurry on his helpers.

"Forward, forward, dear friends!"—was his constant cry.

Day after day, the painstaking labour continued, interrupted only for meals, for the reading of newspapers and letters, and for the news broadcasts morning and evening.

The last page was turned on December 14.

"I finished today all that remained to be done on the first book of *Born of the Storm*," he wrote his mother. "So that I've kept my word to the League Central Committee—to finish the book by December 15.

"Worked 'three shifts' all the past month. Wore out all my secretaries terribly. Made them work from morning until far into the night, with no days off. Poor girls! I don't know what they think of me, but I certainly treated them cruelly.

"That's over now, though. I'm more tired than I can say. But the book is done."

After resting, Ostrovsky planned to work on the second volume of *Born of the Storm*. In one of his folders lay résumés of historical materials studied in preparation for this work, and a few pages already roughly drafted for the novel. He hoped to complete the novel (volumes two and three) by the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution—in less than a year's time.

But the letter to his mother cited above was the last thing he wrote.

December 15 brought the final, fatal attack. His pain was beyond all human bearing. He was compelled to agree to morphine injections.

But he telephoned the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* offices, to ask: "Does Madrid hold?"

Franco's fascist hordes had laid siege to the Spanish capital. Madrid still held; and Ostrovsky exclaimed happily:

"Good for them! Then I must hold out too."

But, a moment later, added sadly:

"Only it doesn't look as if I will."

His illness attacked with such ferocity that, tired and weakened by the past years of intensive labour, he was unable to withstand its onslaught.

All the doctors' efforts were to no avail. They could not halt the attack. Death was approaching.

Ostrovsky met his death courageously as he had lived his life.

One day—it was December 21—he asked the nurse on duty in his room how long she had been working in her profession.

"Twenty-six years," she answered.

"I suppose you've seen no little grief and trouble, doing such work as yours."

"Yes, plenty of that, of course."

"And now it's me," he continued. "I won't bring you much pleasure."

The nurse could barely restrain her tears.

"What are you saying," she cried, in a vain effort at reassurance. "You'll be better in a few days, I'm sure. And that will be my greatest pleasure."

"No, no," he said. "I realize my condition only too well. It's no pleasure I'll be bringing you. And you know, it's such a pity! I only needed one more year to finish up my work. I've so much left unfinished! And the League—it was still expecting much of me."

That night, when his wife sat watching by his bedside, he said to her:

"I'm feeling bad, dear little Raya. Dreadful pain. The doctors don't tell me the truth. But it will end badly this time. I can feel that."

He lay still a while. Only his eyebrows, sharply drawn together, revealed the tension of his struggle against suffering beyond all bearing.

"What I say to you now," he went on, "may be the last I'll ever say intelligibly.... I haven't lived my life so badly. I made my life myself, of course. Nothing came of itself, easily. But I fought always, and—you know yourself—I wasn't downed. And now, I want to tell you this: If life should ever try to treat you badly—remember me. And another thing. Wherever you may be, whatever work you do, study and learn. Never give that up. Without study there

can be no growth. And remember our mothers. They've spent all their lives caring for us. I'm terribly sorry for them. We owe them so much. So very much. And we've given them so little, yet. Take good care of them. Remember them always."

Ostrovsky died on December 22, 1936. He was only thirty-two.

So ended the life of this ardent fighter—a life devoted to its last breath to the great cause of Communism—a life of courage, of passion, and of beauty.

But such men never really die.

Death snatched the pen from his fingers at the very height of his creative labour. But his splendid books remain, his fervid words of truth, the lofty example of his life—so brief, and yet so vast.

The present volume is made up of letters to wife, mother, friends; articles, speeches, and interviews.

Taken together, these materials comprise a moving document of human courage and nobility.

Ostrovsky hoped to write a book about *Korchagin's Happiness*—a continuation of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Death prevented that.

These articles and letters, in their own way, tell the story that he did not live to tell in other form.

S. Tregub

*Articles
and
Speeches*



AN ORDINARY DAY

An article written for the symposium,
The World: One Day
September 27, 1935

The telephone rings, and the stirring visions of sleep take hasty flight. My first sensation on waking is that of bitter pain racking my petrified limbs. So it was a dream, only an instant ago. A dream, that I was young and strong, racing like the wind on my battle-horse to meet the rising sun. I do not open my eyes. There is no need. I remember, now. Eight years ago this cruel illness bound me to my bed, petrified my body, blinded my eyes, plunged me into night and darkness. Eight years ago!

Sharp physical pain descends upon me, swift, cruel, relentless. Instinctively I clench my teeth—the first move of resistance. The telephone rings again. That is a help. Life, I know, calls upon me to conquer. Mother comes in with the morning mail: books, newspapers, a heap of letters. I'm to meet some interesting people, too, today. Life demands me. Away with pain and suffering! As always, the brief morning contest ends in victory for life.

"Help me wash up, Mother, quickly. And then some breakfast."

As Mother carries out the breakfast tray I hear my secretary, Alexandra Petrovna, coming in—exactly on time, as always.

I am carried out to the garden, under the trees. All that I need for the day's work is waiting for me there. I must make haste to live. That is why my desires are always so impatient.

"Read me the papers, Alexandra Petrovna. What's new on the Italo-Abyssinian boundary? Maniac fascism, bomb in hand, has turned that way. Who can tell when it will throw the bomb, and where?"

The papers write of international relations, tremendously involved and intricate; of the irresolvable contradictions of bankrupt imperialism. The threat of war hangs, a black carrion crow, over the world. The dying bourgeoisie has unleashed its last reserve—the fascist hell-hounds. Swiftly, with rope and axe, they are turning bourgeois culture back to the Middle Ages. There is no air to breathe in Europe. Everywhere, the smell of blood. The grim shadow of 1914 stands out for even the blind to see. The world is arming itself in feverish haste.

"Enough of that! Read me what's doing here at home."

And I lie listening to the heartbeat of my beloved Motherland. There she stands before me, in her youth and beauty—our Land of Soviets, joyous, wholesome, unconquerable. She, and she alone—my socialist Motherland—holds high the banner of peace and culture. She, and she alone, has created true brotherhood of peoples. What happiness to be a son of this, my land!

Alexandra Petrovna reads me my letters. They come from every part of our boundless Soviet Union—from Vladivostok, Tashkent, Ferghana, Tiflis, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, Leningrad, Moscow.

Moscow, Moscow! Heart of the world! These letters—they are my country, writing to one of her sons: to me, the author of a book called *How the Steel Was Tempered*; a beginner in the art of writing. Thousands of letters, lovingly filed—my dearest treasure. Who is it that writes to me? Everyone! Young workers in the factories; sailors,

Black Sea and Baltic; flyers; Young Pioneers—all eager to express their thoughts, the feelings my book has aroused. And every letter brings new wealth, new knowledge. Here is one, a summons to labour: "Dear Comrade Ostrovsky! We are waiting impatiently for your new novel, *Born of the Storm*. Finish it quickly. It will be a wonderful book, we know. Remember: we are waiting. We wish you health and success. The workers of the Berezniki Ammonia Works."

Another letter informs me that several publishing houses will be putting out my book next year—a total of 520,000 copies. That is a whole army, an army of books!

I hear a car stop at the gate. Footsteps. "Good morning!" I know the voice: engineer Maltsev, the builder in charge of the summer home the Ukrainian Government is planning as a gift to the writer Ostrovsky—a pretty cottage, set in a shady old orchard, not far from the sea. He unrolls the drawings.

"This will be your study, and this the library, and this your secretary's room. Then the bath. And then these rooms, for your family. There's a big veranda where you can work in summer weather. Plenty of light and sun. Palms, magnolia...."

Everything has been provided for. Yes, here I will work in comfort. In every detail I sense the tender solicitude of my Motherland.

"How do you like it?" Maltsev asks.

"Tremendously!"

"Then we can start building."

He leaves. Alexandra Petrovna opens her note-book. There will be no visitors till evening, now. People know that I am busy. For the next few hours we work intensively. I forget my surroundings—live entirely in the past. It is the stormy year 1919. Guns roar. Fires blaze in the night. Our land has been invaded by armed hordes of interventionists, and—shoulder to shoulder with their

elders—the heroic youth of my novel join in battle against the enemy.

"It's four o'clock," Alexandra Petrovna says quietly. "Time for you to rest."

Dinner. An hour's rest. The evening mail: newspapers, magazines, and again letters. A little reading, or rather, listening: Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*. The sun sinks westward. I cannot see it, but I feel the cool approach of evening.

A sound of many footsteps. Clear, ringing laughter. My visitors have come: a group of heroic Soviet girls who have just broken the world record in the parachute jump with delayed opening. And with them, a company of Young Communist League members from the Sochi building sites. Even here, in my quiet garden, I can hear the distant rumble of the building going on in town. And how clearly I can picture it all: the smooth pavement covering daily more of Sochi's streets; the new sanatoriums, huge, palatial, where only a year ago there was nothing but weeds.

Evening. The house is very still. My visitors have left. I lie listening to a book. Then, a light tap at the door. The last visit planned for this day: an interview with a reporter from the *Moscow Daily News*. He speaks to me in broken Russian.

"Is it true you were once an ordinary worker?"

"Yes. A stoker."

I can hear his pencil racing.

"Tell me: don't you suffer terribly? Blind, and bound to your bed, all these long years! Don't you ever despair at this hopeless loss of the joys of seeing, of moving about?"

I smile.

"I simply haven't the time for such thoughts. Happiness takes many forms. And I am happy, profoundly happy. My purely personal tragedy is blotted out by the

wonderful, the never-to-be-forgotten joy of creative labour, by the knowledge that I, too, am helping to build our splendid edifice of Socialism."

Night. I am ready to sleep—tired, but profoundly satisfied. One more day of life has passed. An ordinary day. And I have lived it well.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A letter to the editorial board
of the magazine *Molodaya Guardia* (*Young Guard*)
*January 1932**

What I have attempted to describe in literary form is actual fact. The comrades described are real people. Some of them are gone, fallen in the struggle; others are alive and working today.

I knew all the chief characters, and I have tried to present them truthfully, showing both their failings and their merits.

The story is laid in the little Ukrainian town of Shepetovka. My aim has been to portray the childhood and youth of workers' children, and the heavy labour that was their lot from early life; to show how they were drawn into the class struggle. I deal only with facts; and that has bound me somewhat. At times, the facts have overridden me. But to write otherwise would have meant writing fiction, failing to tell the story as it really happened.

Some of the characters retain their real names, but a part of the names are fictitious.

There are people alive today who witnessed the Petluna troops' pogrom in Shepetovka in 1919—the Polish Whites' reign of terror in the winter of 1920—the execu-

* This letter was attached to the manuscript of Part One of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.—Ed.

tion of captured members of our underground Party organization—the coming of the Germans; who were in the engine crew that killed the German soldier, or figure in other episodes that I describe.

I have asked them to read the chapters in which they are concerned, and they have confirmed the facts as I present them.

It is my one desire to give our young people these reminiscences in readable form. I call my book neither story, nor tale, nor novel. I call it simply, *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Should it be required, here, briefly, is my biography:

I was born in 1904, in a working-class family. Went to work at the age of twelve. Education—elementary. Trade—electrician's helper. Joined the Young Communist League in 1919, the Party in 1924. Fought in the Civil War. 1915 to 1919, worked as kitchen boy, warehouse labourer, stoker's helper at a power station, etc. In 1921, worked at the Kiev railway shops. In 1922 worked with a shock group building a railway spur line to bring up firewood. Caught cold, and then fell seriously ill—typhoid fever. I got over that, but early in 1923, in view of bad health, I was forbidden physical labour. Got assigned to other work, at the border. In 1923 served as a battalion commissar. In the following years worked as a Young Communist League functionary, on district level. In 1927 my health broke down completely, undermined by those early years of struggle, and I was recalled from my work by the Ukrainian League Central Committee. Everything possible has been done to cure my illness and return me to the ranks, but as yet without success. Disabled for organizational work, I became a propagandist: led Marxist study circles, taught young Party members. This I did, confined to bed. Then came one more blow. I lost my sight. I had to drop the study circles. Last year was devoted entirely to my book. Physically, I have lost almost all

a man can lose. All that remains is the inexhaustible energy of youth, and the passionate urge to be useful in any way I can to my Party, to my class. My book is an attempt to relate all this in literary form. It is my first attempt at writing.

*Member of the C.P.S.U.(B.)—membership book
No. 0285973*

Nikolai Alexeyevich Ostrovsky

HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED—AND HOW THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN

A few words about myself, before going on to my work on the book.

It so happened, through the stormy years of the Civil War and the years that followed, that my health was drastically undermined. In the last few years I have never left my bed. I cannot walk. I cannot move. Two years ago I lost the sight of my left eye. The right was already blind. Every ground for saying, "With such handicaps, a man cannot work."

And it did seem to me that my blindness would raise insuperable obstacles to my work. I was not at all sure that, writing by others' hands, I would be able to express all the thoughts and impressions, so infinitely varied, at times so difficult of formulation, that I felt the need to set down on paper.

With pen in hand, it is easy to write, say, a letter to a friend; to give free and forceful expression to your thoughts and feelings. But when this same letter must be dictated to some third person, it will in almost every case be far less vivid, far less intimate.

Still, as I had no other choice, I began to work in this way—dictating my book, and watching anxiously to see

what was coming of it. And now that the book is done, I can say with firm conviction, as our leader has said, "There are no fortresses that Bolsheviks cannot capture."

Yes, comrades, a man can work in the most difficult, the most atrocious conditions. And not only can, but must, if other conditions are not to be had.

A man can do this if his will to work is inconquerable, if his persistence is great enough—and if he has quiet. Yes, quiet—that is indispensable. Without it, there can be no real work. If you have six other people in the same room with you, two of them lively children, and all six talking incessantly, literary work is out of the question.

Besides the actual background of my book, I shall deal here also with a number of other things, having no bearing on the story.

It was quite some time ago that I first felt the urge to write about events that I had witnessed and, in some cases, participated in. But I was a Young Communist League functionary at the time, and very occupied with organizational work; and, too, I was a little afraid to tackle so exacting a task.

My one attempt—and that not literary, but a bare registration of facts—was a paper written in collaboration with another comrade at the request of the History of Ukrainian Youth Organizations editorial board. So that I have never written before, and this book is a first effort. But I spent several years on preparation for it. Being ill, I had plenty of time at my disposal—a thing I had never had before. And I began reading, eagerly, greedily, impatient to satisfy my old hunger for books. No evil so great but it brings some good with it!

In my first years of illness I mastered the course of studies required for the first year of the Communist University, and filled in my meagre literary background by

a thorough acquaintance with the works of our Soviet writers.

Without this lengthy, comprehensive preparation, I could never have written anything.

My idea was to record the story of a group of workers' children, from childhood to the time of their entry into the Party. The action of my story, therefore, lies in the period from 1915 to the present day.

The Party and League youth guard, since it came into being, has trained tens of thousands of splendid people, selflessly devoted to their Party and their class.

They fought in the Red Army during the Civil War, and then, after the war, battled to overcome our country's economic disruption. They threw themselves into creative labour during the restoration period. They march in the new advance, so far-flung in these last few years, towards the building of Socialism in our country. And this struggle, this advance, afford inexhaustible material for proletarian literature.

These things must be written of—written of for those new millions who are now coming into the Young Communist League; for the generation that neither witnessed nor participated in the heroic fight of the working-class youth, shoulder to shoulder with their elders, for the very life of our Republic.

I began to write. And immediately I made my first mistake: picked one episode, and wrote it down, out of all context. A random sort of beginning.

That first bit remained unused. I could not fit it into the book.

Sometime later I read in the *Literaturnaya Uchoba* (*Literary Studies*) magazine that many writers begin their books at the end, or, sometimes, in the middle, and write the beginning last.

That may be all very well for masters of the pen; but beginners, to my mind, should begin at the beginning

and work steadily through to the end. That will work out far better.

Akvotepesh* is a little town in the Ukraine, in what was formerly the Volhynia Gubernia. It is an important railway junction. During the stormy years, it was a scene of repeated collision between the forces of Revolution and the forces of reaction.

The intensity of the struggle may be easily imagined from the one fact that Shepetovka (reversed, the name reads Akvotepesh) changed hands something like thirty times. Almost all the happenings recorded in my book are fact.

I remember with particular force the pogrom launched in the town by Colonel Golub. And I realize that I have not succeeded in my attempt to render the horror of this mass slaughter of the helpless Jewish population. I can only say that my description falls far short of the bestial evil that actually took place.

The killing of the German soldier and the halting of the punitive train are recorded as described to me by the members of the engine crew. All three are alive today, members of the Bolshevik Party and shock workers at the same old station.

Dictating a passage about one or another character, I always begin by picturing him, or her, in my mind. My memory is good, and that helps greatly. I have a tenacious memory for people. Ten years may pass, and still I will recall them clearly.

Tracing in my imagination the scene that I am dictating, I see it before me, see it all the time. When I stop seeing, I must stop dictating. No beginner, it seems to me, can possibly describe a scene or a character really vividly unless he sees them thus in his mind. And—it

* Akvotepesh—the name by which Ostrovsky at first planned to call the town of Shepetovka, in *How the Steel Was Tempered*.—Ed.

may be strange, but I see these pictures best of all when I am listening to music: soft music, it must be, and melodious—best of all, the violin.

I wrote the scene of Seryozha's death that way. The radio was on, playing Ippolitov-Ivanov's *Caucasian Melodies*. I did not dictate, but wrote by hand.

In contributions to magazines designed to help and teach beginners, our leading writers devote much space to general questions of theory, but say nothing about the practical, technical aspect of their work—composition, say, or chapter construction, and the like. Such things they treat as unessential trifles. That is not right. A knowledge of the technical side of writing, an idea of how to plan his work, is an essential thing to the beginner.

How much energy is wasted needlessly, because beginners have to search and grope for things long since discovered by experienced writers!

All writers, without exception, speak of the importance of a memorandum book. They are perfectly right. How many important thoughts and moods are lost because they are not noted down immediately! Hard as it is to write things down through others, I too have started a memorandum book. And it is already doing me good service.

The names of the characters in my book are for the most part fictitious. Fyodor Zhukhrai—I have kept only his first name unchanged; and he was not the chairman of the Gubernia Cheka, but the head of the special department. I do not know how far I have done justice to this man of iron—Baltic sailor and revolutionary. We have such comrades in our Party, people whom no wind, no storm can fell or halt. Splendid people!

1932

I RENDER ACCOUNT

Report delivered at a meeting of the Bureau
of the Sochi Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.),
and replies to questions

May 16, 1935

Comrades, *How the Steel Was Tempered* is my response to an appeal in which the Central Committee of the Young Communist League calls upon Soviet writers to portray the young revolutionary of our time. Take the world's literature, from the Middle Ages to our day. The young people described in its masterpieces are young people of the ruling classes. How vividly, how forcefully, the great writers of bourgeois literature have portrayed the young people of their own class: their lives, the formation of their characters, their aspirations; how they are trained in the pursuit of glory; how, inheriting their parents' wealth, they proceed to multiply that wealth, developing ever further the technique of pumping the blood of the working class!

It is a matter of honour for our Soviet writers to portray in their books the young revolutionary of our own day, the day of proletarian revolution; to portray the young people who fought, with their fathers, for Soviet rule, and who today are building Socialism. Splendid people, courageous, heroic! There are too few such characters (young heroes) in our literature. Our life is more heroic than our books.

How did I come to be a writer? Illness put me out of commission. I could not work among my comrades; could not move about; lost my sight. Life set me the task of mastering some new weapon, that might return me to the ranks of the advancing proletariat. Writing—that can be done even when a person cannot move or see.

Write—of what? "Write about what you yourself have seen and experienced," my comrades told me. "Write

about the people you know, the environment in which you grew. Write about those who fought under the Party's banners for Soviet rule." And that became my first theme—the basic theme of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. I worked for four years on that book (1930-1934). Our young people have received it well, and that is my greatest happiness.

There is one thing I feel I must make clear. In articles appearing in the press my novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* is often treated as an autobiographical document—as the life story of Nikolai Ostrovsky. That, of course, is not entirely correct. A novel is, first and foremost, a work of art. And, writing my book as a novel, I made use of the author's right of invention. My novel is based on facts; but it cannot be called a document. Were it intended as a document, it would have been differently written. It is a novel, and not the biography of Young Communist League member Ostrovsky. This I must point out, since otherwise I might be reproached with lack of Bolshevik modesty.

I shall not stop here on the story. You have all read it....

The book has been published in Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Mordovian. It is being translated into English, French, and German, by the International Association of Revolutionary Writers, for publication in the magazine *International Literature*. It is also being translated into Byelorussian and into the languages of several other of the Soviet nationalities. Printings, 1932 through 1934, total 70,000 copies. In 1935 it will come out, in several languages, in about 150,000 copies.

At present I am working on a novel called *Born of the Storm*, describing the struggle of the Ukrainian proletariat and peasantry against Polish imperialism. Period: late 1918 and early 1919. My aim in this book is to show our youth the enemy. A new generation has grown up,

a generation born after the October Revolution. This generation has never seen a landowner, or a manufacturer, or a gendarme—has never seen those who drenched the fields of Galicia and the Ukraine with the blood of the working people.

In my new book I shall show these hangmen, show the past as it really was. I do this for our youth—that their hands may not hold back in battles to come, if battle is forced upon us. I am writing this book for those young people whose lot it may be to rise in defence of our socialist Motherland—to drive back, with steel and shell, all who may attempt to violate her borders.

Born of the Storm is a political novel; and that involves additional difficulties. The political situation in the Ukraine and in Poland in 1918-1919, when the Republic was ablaze, and the fronts stretched over thousands of versts, was very intricate, and its treatment demands great penetration and precision. That is no easy task. To be done properly, it requires a study of the historical documents relating to the period of the Civil War.

Here in Sochi, unfortunately, I cannot draw upon such materials. They are concentrated at the central archives. For the time being, I base myself upon the little that I have at my disposal here, or have already read elsewhere.

I plan to end the novel with a description of the rout of the Polish Whites at Kiev and their expulsion from the Ukraine.

And, in completion—the victorious march of the First Mounted Army.

True, the Polish lords were not annihilated then. They were saved by what they themselves called “the miracle on the Vistula.” We Bolsheviks know that miracles do not happen. And should those lords attempt new trouble, there will be no second miracle. That we can say confidently.

I plan my work ahead, of course. Not a five-year plan, true. I dare not look so far forward. I plan out my life for one year at a time. By the end of this year, I should finish the first book of my new novel. And after that, for the Children's Publishing House, I hope to write a book called *Pavka's Childhood*—a sort of complement to *How the Steel Was Tempered*. I will write it with pleasure, for our youngsters. Their need for new books is too neglected.

The Ukrainian Central Committee of the Young Communist League has decided, as you know, to have a sound film made after *How the Steel Was Tempered*. A group of comrades from the Ukrainian Studios will soon be arriving to work with me on the script.

I shall do my best to carry out my year's plan. The new novel will appear in the *Molodaya Guardia* magazine—if it is approved, of course. It was the *Molodaya Guardia* that brought me into literature. And it is constantly helping me in my creative work.

I should like to say a few words here about the solicitude that has been shown me by the Party and the Young Communist League. I have been provided every condition to ease my work. Such solicitude is a source of new strength. It makes you feel that you are really back in the ranks, in the very fullest sense. I can say truly that I am a happy man. Of course, the doctors have their idea that I shall soon be off on my "last leave." But they said the same five years ago, and yet Ostrovsky has come through those five years, and has every intention of holding out another three, at the very least....

Letters come to me, hundreds of them, from Young Communist League organizations all over our country—letters that call on me to keep up the fight. And they set my heart on fire, make me feel it a crime to live a single day in idleness.

My working day is ten to twelve hours out of the twenty-four. I must make haste in life.

That is all. I am ready for your questions.

... I have periods of great intensity, periods of rapid advance on the creative front. At such times, all my thoughts go into my writing. There are weeks on end when I do no reading, except for the newspapers. But then, when all I have accumulated has been set down on paper, things are reversed.

I get all the magazines that are published. Read the *Bolshevik* regularly, and also the magazines of literary criticism. Of fiction, I read every new book that makes a name for itself in one way or another. A person cannot possibly read all that comes out.

Before beginning my new novel, I spent eight months on study. In those eight months I read through the fundamental works of world literature. Such books as *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and many others, I have read over and over again.

... The Writers' Congress gave me a course of action. Particularly Gorky's speech, and Comrade Zhdanov's. Three weeks ago I received a copy of the stenographic record of the Congress. This I shall study once more, in every detail....

All is well with me. I lack nothing but health. My mood is cheerful; my head is clear. I am a happy man, and that is no invention.

HAIL, LIFE!

Speech on receiving the Order of Lenin

Sochi, November 24, 1935

Our country's revolutionary Government has adjudged me a great reward. What can I say in reply? We strove always to model our lives upon the lives of those amazing people, the Old Bolsheviks, who led us through the years of heroic battle to the joy of living in the Land of

Socialism. We, the youth, strove always to resemble them. We venerated them. We were devoted heart and soul to our commanders, our leaders. And when illness bound me to my bed, I gave all that I had in me to show my teachers, the Old Bolsheviks, that the younger generation of our class will never surrender, whatever the circumstances. I fought my illness. It tried to break me, to tear me from the ranks, but I declared, "No surrender!" I was confident of victory. I kept on, because I felt our Party's tender care. And today I face life joyfully, for it has returned me to the ranks.

None but the Leninist Communist Party could have trained us in this spirit of selfless devotion to the Revolution. It is my wish for every young worker that he strive to be a heroic fighter; for there can be no happiness greater than in knowing oneself a true son of the working class, of the Party. And I can say this: it could not be otherwise. Young people, in our land, cannot be otherwise; for behind them stands our eighteen-year-old country, young and beautiful, wholesome and mighty. Our country—we defended her against her enemies; we helped to build her into what she is today. And now we are entering a life of happiness, and before us lies a future still more glorious—a future so glorious that none can stop us in our struggle to achieve it. And so, as the *Pravda* has written, the blind fighter marches on in step with the great march of his people.

Hail, life, in the land which has raised the banner of world revolution!

Hail, struggle! Forward, young people of our glorious country!

Be worthy sons of our young Motherland!

Long live our mighty Party, leading us to Communism!

STUBBORN EFFORT, TIRELESS STUDY

Address to a congress of writers
of the Azov-Black Sea Territory*

December 6, 1935

Dear comrades! Accept my ardent Communist greetings!

Comrades, I have been accredited a voting delegate to your congress. I very much regret that I cannot greet you directly, from the congress platform. But technical development in our day is so far advanced that I am able to speak to you in spite of the distance separating us; I am able to take active part in this congress, the opening of which I heard by radio, yesterday, with the greatest interest. And so, I should like to say a few words of greeting to those of you who are newly entering into the world of literature. We hear a great deal about our youth, about the young people who are coming forward to join our older masters of the pen. I know them well, and love them dearly—our country's splendid youth.

I myself am one of those brought up by the Young Communist League, and it is as a brother that I greet you.

You have chosen writing as your work in life; and, coming to this congress, you bring with you the one great question: how does a person become a writer? To youth, it seems that there must be some clear, miraculous recipe for this. The masters of literature know well that writing is work—anguishing, yet at the same time infinitely joyous work.

I must tell you, my young comrades, that anyone can become a writer. But that requires stubborn effort, and tireless study; it requires an unceasing quest for new

* Delivered by radio, from Ostrovsky's rooms at Orekhovaya Ulitsa 47, Sochi.—*Ed.*

knowledge, an unflagging aspiration to the heights of human culture. That you must understand, and remember always. Without it, you may write books marked here and there with brilliant talent; but you will never create works of real breadth and scope.

Let me tell you my own experience. Fifteen or sixteen years ago I witnessed, and participated in, a vast struggle, historic events. I saw the deeds of heroic fighters. But could I then, an ignorant boy, have written such a book as I have written now, after persistent study; as I have written now, equipped with an understanding of the theory of the revolutionary struggle, with the ability to generalize what I then experienced? No, I could not. For it is not enough to see, to observe, to feel. To write, you must study, must acquire a thorough knowledge of life, must know the finest creations of world culture—must broaden your outlook, and learn to examine practical experience in the light of Marxist-Leninist theory. Only then, setting pen to paper, generalizing your own observations, can you be confident in the real value of what you write.

And that is why the question of a writer's biography is so very important. A young writer can develop as a writer only if he develops as a man, as a fighter, if he keeps in step with our whole country. You cannot grow to maturity in a day. That is impossible. And the vast cultural heritage of the past is not to be mastered at a swoop. Our young comrades must remember that. Such mastery requires steady persistence, tremendous, untiring labour. But the very process of this labour, the very difficulties to be overcome, bring such heart-stirring pleasure! You wish to become writers. But you must know that a writer is a teacher. And only he can teach who knows more than those he teaches—who has something to tell them. Our readers, in their millions, have grown very discerning. They have gained greatly in knowledge;

and they will not forgive us if the books we write for them are dull and mediocre.

And so we writers must stride in the front ranks of the advance—not plod along in the hindmost baggage trains. A writer lagging in the rear cannot, has not the right to preach to those who have left him far behind.

A writer cannot stand aside from life, from struggle—like some bourgeois scientist, pottering alone in his laboratory over the chemistry and anatomy of writing. He cannot be an indifferent onlooker.

Only he who marches in the ranks of the foremost, ablaze with the fervour of the struggle, he whose heart bleeds at every defeat, who rejoices in every victory, with our whole people—only he can write a book that will be stirring and truthful, a book that will be a call. Our literature is the literature of truth, the socialist truth of mankind's present and future day.

Bourgeois writers, witnessing the fearful oppression of the working people by a handful of parasites, are constantly compelled to lie to their readers. It is not easy, after all, to say fine things about a banker or a merchant who spends his days in brutal, merciless sweating of the working people, and his evenings in idyllic scenes of family love, caressing his wife and children. But we—we have no need to lie. Our life is beautiful, romantic, almost beyond belief. It offers us no end of splendid themes and splendid characters—whole armies of them, bursting upon us, filling our minds, vying one with another in power and beauty. We can barely keep pace with life, with its swift, turbulent advance. Even today we see, taking shape before us, the splendid new people of the future—people such as the world has never known before, the people of Communism. And we must portray these people in our books. What a wealth of material life offers us! What a wealth of topics! "That is old," people sometimes say, of one topic or another; "that is outdated."

Wrong! There is no such thing as an outdated topic. There are people who call the Civil War an old topic, outdated. Nothing of the kind! Ten years from now, a hundred years, it will still be fresh, still full of wonder—find but the skill to portray it anew, ever more truly and more vividly! But that we can only do if we are constantly advancing, constantly, tirelessly working to increase our knowledge and our skill.

That is how we must develop—we, the younger literary generation. And only if we so develop can we write books that will be worthy of our glorious country.

Hail, our Soviet literature, its Communist moral code, its truth!

Long live our Communist Party and its great leader, our teacher, that astounding man of our great age, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin!

MY HAPPIEST YEAR

An article published in the newspaper *Izvestia*
January 1, 1936

Were anyone to ask what year of my life had brought me the greatest happiness, I could answer only, "1935."

There can be no measure to a fighter's happiness, if his will, his perseverance, have gained his country's praise; if on his breast, where the heart beats, he wears the Order of Lenin.

The year 1935, for me, was a year of fulfilment, completing the initial stage of my creative work, of my study and development, of my advance.

I meet the new year of 1936 imbued with hopes, with creative aspirations, with a vast desire to work. Moved by this desire, I have come to Moscow, to be closer to our

national archives—indispensable to me in the writing of my new novel, *Born of the Storm*.

January 2 will be my first day of work in Moscow. On that day I begin my study of the documents of the Civil War.

It was not too easily that my esteemed friends, the doctors, persuaded me to take these days of rest after the trip to Moscow—so imperious was the desire to set to work, at once, without delay.

When I read the impassioned speeches of our Stakhanovites, of our finest heroes—shock workers at our factories and building projects; when I read their speeches, ringing with the joy of labour and with the deep satisfaction that labour brings, I understand their feelings heart and soul. I, too, invariably experience these same feelings as I drop off to sleep, tired but happy, after a day of intensive labour.

I have not worked on my new novel in the last few months. Circumstances compelled me to put off this work. Now I return to my heroes, return to the winter of 1919 in the snow-covered Ukraine. Andrei Ptakha rises before me, vivid as life itself—the young stoker, with his curly flaxen hair. His grey eyes, so courageous, are turned on me in stern reproach.

"You've let us down, brother. Can't you hear the hoof-beats thundering? It's time you sent us into battle!"

And beside him—pretty, dark-eyed Olesya Kovallo. I love Olesya dearly. She will grow into a fine Young Communist, I know, and a helper to her father—old engine-driver Kovallo, member of the Bolshevik underground.

I press your hands, young friends, and promise not to part with you again.

MY REPORT TO THE TENTH LEAGUE CONGRESS

An article written January 7, 1936, in the period of preparation for the Tenth Congress of the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union

This congress comes at a most notable time, a time that may be described as one of unparalleled achievements and victories in the Land of Socialism.

Each new year brings such tremendous changes in our life that, looking back over the past, we stand amazed at the scope and pace at which we are building the new life, new relationships, new culture, new national wealth. The victory of Socialism in our national economy, on its every front; the growth of our national wealth, possible only now, when all class forces hostile to the proletariat have been completely routed; the mighty Stakhanovite movement, which has smashed the conservative norms and standards holding back our productive forces and has offered outstanding examples of labour heroism; the mighty advance of our whole people to the peaks of culture and knowledge—all this confronts the Young Communist League, true helper of the Party, with serious and important problems, which the League's Tenth Congress is called upon to solve.

The training of our country's youth, their Bolshevik, Communist training—that is one of the basic tasks of the Leninist Young Communist League. And it will be only just to demand of every one of us—young writers sprung from the League, trained and taught in its ranks—what we have to report to the League's victory congress.

True to the revolutionary traditions of the League, my League, I reply briefly, concisely, as in a report from the field of battle.

It is my greatest satisfaction that I greet the Tenth Congress as a fighter in the ranks, as an active member

of the Leninist Young Communist League; that the work I am doing, in the League and for the League, entitles me still to the high honour of such membership. The congress finds me at work on a new novel, to be called *Born of the Storm*. All my days are spent in the company of my characters—youthful fighters for the power of the Soviets; and my heart and mind are full of the Young Communist League of the heroic years of the Civil War—inseparably bound up with the League today.

I work in the desire to show our younger comrades, the comrades who have never seen such a thing as a real, live gendarme—to bring these comrades the grim truth about the days when our present happiness, our present beautiful and joyous life, was being won, at the price of the blood of the finest sons of the working class; to show them the bitter struggle that had to be waged against the eternal enemies of the working people—against the exploiters, against the jailers. These fortunate young people, born in the October days, must learn how the working class won its freedom—at the cost of what tremendous effort. Only with this knowledge in their hearts will the younger generation of Socialism be equipped to stand with the devotion of their elders, defending the Socialist Motherland against armed, bandit fascism.

Working on this novel, I live in the closest contact with the life of the League today. I have been elected a delegate to the Ukrainian League Congress from the town in which, seventeen years ago, I became a member of the League. I am preparing to speak at that congress; and my speech will be devoted to the young people of our day.

What sort of young people do we need? Life demands much of the young people of our day. The young people of our revolutionary land are amazingly unlike the young people of capitalist countries.

Through all its eighteen years of existence, the League has moulded our young people. Changing steadily in out-

ward appearance, in cultural level, they have carried within them always, unchanged, the traditions, the finest aspirations, of the revolutionary proletariat.

Always and everywhere, Young Communist League members, the advanced youth, carry in their hearts the flame, the aspirations of those years in which they entered upon the revolutionary struggle. We know well the League members of 1917, of 1919 and 1920—the period of the Civil War; we know the League members of the restoration period, the reconstruction period, the great five-year plans.

The League member today presents new traits, distinguishing our time from the past. Our country has advanced immeasurably in these years; and the demands of our society upon its youth have grown.

They are vast, these demands, vast as our country's attainments and prospects.

The young people of our country—we conceive of them as fighters in the front line; as builders, straining to the peaks of technical achievement and of culture; buoyant, cheerful, insatiably eager for knowledge; ruled by Communist ethics; devoted selflessly to the cause of Socialism.

Such is the concept of our youth that I shall present at the Ukrainian League Congress.

In particular, I shall dwell on the young woman of the Land of Soviets. In nothing, whatever her difficulties, does she yield to the young man of her generation. In many things, she is forging ahead of him.

My brief report is done.

Hail, the Tenth Congress of the Leninist Young Communist League, the congress of victorious youth!

Long live the Bolshevik Party, which trained us, made us what we are!

TO THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE MEMBERS OF MY NATIVE TOWN

Message of Greeting to the Shepetovka Area Conference
of the Leninist Young Communist League of the Ukraine

Dear Comrades!

How I want you to feel my firm handclasp—to feel the beating of my heart, and its devotion to you, my young friends! I send you ardent greetings. It is a proud feeling to know that the Shepetovka District has elected me as one of its delegates to the area conference. I am grateful for this honour and this trust.

I cannot speak these heartfelt words from the platform of your conference. But I am with you. I am in the ranks. I meet the coming tenth League congress as a fighter and a League member. I have retained my right to this high honour, to membership in the Leninist Young Communist League, by my work—work in the League, and for the League. Inside my Party membership book lies its little son: my membership book in the Leninist League, cherished and treasured as the witness of all my life in the League.

Seventeen years ago, in 1919, there were five of us—Young Communist League members—in Shepetovka: a group organized by the Shepetovka Party Committee and Revolutionary Committee. I have described those five in my novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Today, there are hundreds of you here—thousands, even. Led by our great Party, the Leninist League has grown and strengthened. New young fighters have appeared—they were children in those early days. The ranks of the younger revolutionary generation, selflessly devoted to the cause of Communism, are growing, advancing. Heroically, Shepetovka's first League members fought the Polish gentry, fought Petlura, fought the bandit gangs of every breed

and trend. And the second League generation, which you, comrades, represent, will fight heroically as the first.

The League in the border regions bears a very special responsibility.

May your vigilance never fail, loyal helpers of our Party!

Fraternal greetings, League members of my native town!

Hail, our happy life, won in bitter struggle against the enemies of the people!

Long live the great Party of Lenin and Stalin, which has led us to victory!

Nikolai Ostrovsky

Moscow, February 1, 1936

HOLD HIGH THE LOFTY CALLING OF THE WRITER

Notes prepared for a speech to the Tenth Congress
of the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union

Moscow, April 17, 1936

Dear comrades, I mount this platform with a feeling of deep anxiety and concern; for I am a fighter in that same battalion of "engineers of human souls" that has been so severely criticized here. Gathered today to review the young guard of our mighty union of nations, what do we find? You can see for yourselves: all life is sweeping forward in a mighty advance. The liberated people, led by the Bolshevik Party, is attaining new and ever new heights of achievement. But in this victorious advance the battalion of "engineers of human souls" is falling down, to put it bluntly, on the vitally important tasks entrusted to it. What do we see? On the firing line, a platoon of advanced, courageous fighters. These do not lag behind

in the swift, victorious advance. Their weapons show no sign of rust. Alexander Fadeyev has brought his Red partisans to the firing line; Sholokhov is rallying his Cossack Bolsheviks along the quiet Don; Vsevolod Vishnevsky has brought into the battle his revolutionary Baltic sailors. Yanovsky has come forward, with his *Riders*, to take his place in our ranks. Yes, and another half-a-score or so of good fighting men. That is the whole platoon. But where are the rest? For, after all, our battalion numbers almost three thousand! Our tall, grey-haired battalion commander—famed and gloried, great master of his art—twists his moustache, whispering grimly, "Eh, but those trailers are too much for me! Breakfasting, I suppose, fifty kilometres or so behind the forward line. Their kitchen's bogged in a swamp, somewhere back there. Bringing down shame on my grey head!"* That is a joke, of course, a bitter joke; but it contains no little truth.

Our young people, eager to live, eager for knowledge, for music and literature—our young people look to their poets, to their writers, for resounding songs, for beautiful and bracing songs, in which both words and music would reach the soul. They look to their writers for books—vivid, stirring, truthful, talented. And it is for us, it is a matter of honour for us, to give our youth what they are seeking. Has Soviet literature the creative talent to satisfy these demands?

It has.

* By the term, "battalion of engineers of human souls," Ostrovsky means the body of Soviet writers. His references, further, are to Alexander Fadeyev's *Debacle*, Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and Yuri Yanovsky's *Riders*; to Vsevolod Vishnevsky's *Optimistic Tragedy*, and his script for the film *We of Kronstadt*. The grey-haired "commander" of the writers' battalion is Maxim Gorky, Chairman of the Soviet Writers' Union.—Ed.

EYES ON THE HEIGHTS

Let there be fewer books, if need be; but the books must be good. There is no room on our bookshelves for the mediocre. No one has the right to steal time, to steal honest workers' hours of leisure.

Only he can teach who knows more than those to be taught.

The writer must make it his task to root out the remnants of capitalism still persisting in the minds of men.

Our reader has become a severe, a merciless critic. Let none dare try to feed him chaff. The people is not to be fooled. That will not work. Our reader will detect anything false, or insincere, or artificial in your writing. He will throw aside your book unfinished, with a sharp word of reproach, and speak badly of it everywhere. And your good name, once lost, will not be easily regained.

We must hold high the lofty calling of the writer in the Soviet land. And only by honest labour, we know; only by untiring labour, by concentration of his every iota of energy, moral and physical, by unceasing study, and again study; only by direct participation in the struggle and in the work of construction, can the writer win his place in the front ranks. There can be no resting on old laurels, no lingering over past victories. Our country's advanced people, the Stakhanovites, we all know, never rest content with what has been achieved. They strive always, by heroic work, to retain the leadership in labour. That has become a matter of honour to them. Yet many a writer, with one good book written, tends to rest on his laurels. But life moves swiftly. Life has no forgiveness for immobility. And life leaves such writers behind. That is their tragedy.

THE "DANGER" OF GLORY

When the land sings glory to a young fighter for his achievements as a shock worker, that does not mean that he is now entitled to forget the ground under his feet. Keep your feet firmly on your native earth. Live the life of the collective, and remember: it was the collective that trained you. The day on which you break away from the collective will be the beginning of the end. Modesty adorns the fighter. Conceit and arrogance come from the capitalist past. They come of individualism. The more modest the fighter, the more is he to be admired. And that holds very, very true of writers also.

NEW FEELINGS

Friendship, honesty, collectivism, humanity—such are our companions. The training of courage and valour; selfless devotion to the Revolution, and hatred for the enemy—such are our laws. An enemy with arms in hand will find nothing in our land but death and destruction. A soldier of a capitalist army who has cast down his arms and ceased to fight is no longer an enemy. We will help him to clear his brains and turn his gun against his own oppressors. But—for the enemy who comes in arms, our hatred knows no limit. In armed struggle, the young fighter of the Soviet land knows but one aim, but one aspiration: to destroy the enemy. Love of the Motherland, multiplied by hatred for the enemy—only such love can bring us victory. And in order to hate, people must know the enemy, must know his baseness, his perfidy, his brutality. Of this, it is the writer's task to tell.

ON THE DEATH OF GORKY

A TELEGRAM

I am shaken to the depths of my soul by this irretrievable loss. Gorky has left us. A fearful thought. Only yesterday he was alive, thinking, rejoicing with us at the tremendous victories of our Motherland, to which his creative genius was so wholly devoted. What a weight of responsibility now falls upon Soviet literature, with the loss of him who organized and inspired its work!

Farewell, dear Gorky, beloved, unforgettable!

Nikolai Ostrovsky

Sochi, June 19, 1936

INTERVIEW

*Given to News Chronicle Moscow correspondent Rodman
September 30, 1936*

Rodman: I had planned to visit you in Moscow, as soon as I got back from London, but I didn't find you there. You'd already left for Sochi.*

Ostrovsky: Yes, I left Moscow on May 15.

Rodman: Where do you work in the summer months?

Ostrovsky: Here on this porch, or on the veranda. They're both cool and shady.

Rodman: You're very widely read abroad, you know, these days.

Ostrovsky: So I understand. My book is being translated into French, Dutch, and English. The comrade in charge of translations of Soviet authors into foreign languages has signed an agreement already with some English publisher—I don't know which.

* The correspondent's share of this interview is retranslated from the Russian record.—*Ed.*

Rodman: Gollancz, perhaps. Or it might be Unwin.

Ostrovsky: The English edition will be cut a little—fifty-three pages. But for purely commercial reasons; nothing political. The translation was ready three months ago, so that it will probably soon be out. The book has appeared in Czech and in Japanese. A Canadian edition is in preparation. In New York, the book is being printed serially in Russian, in the daily *Novy Mir*.

Rodman: I only started *How the Steel Was Tempered* a short while ago, and I haven't got very far yet. Russian is difficult reading for me. Very little of Soviet literature has been translated into English.

Ostrovsky: That's true. Nothing but *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and part of *The Soil Upturned*. . . . The Japanese edition came as a great surprise to me. The gendarme censorship there is very stiff.

Rodman: But that only applies to things that are dangerous politically. Japan has a very extensive intelligentsia.

Ostrovsky: And *How the Steel Was Tempered*—isn't it dangerous, then, to your mind?

Rodman: I've read too little of it to judge. But I do know that there's great interest abroad in your personality. Your personality plays a large part in the book—isn't that so?

Ostrovsky: At the beginning I denied emphatically that the story was autobiographical. But there's no use denying it any longer. The book tells the truth, without the slightest adornment. You see, it wasn't a writer that wrote it. I had never written a line before. Not only was I no writer—I had never had anything to do with literary work, or even newspaper writing. The book was written by a stoker who had become a Young Communist League functionary. The one thing that guided me was the determination not to say anything untrue. And then, you see, when I began to write this story of my life, I had

no thought of publishing. The book was designed for the Youth History editorial board—as a record of the Civil War, and the building of working-class organizations, and the beginnings of the Young Communist League in the Ukraine. But the comrades felt that the book had literary value too. Taken as a novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered* has many shortcomings that a professional writer would never permit himself. There are several episodic characters, who appear only once or twice and are never mentioned again. But these people existed in real life, and so they appear in my book as well. Were I writing it today, the book might turn out smoother, better written; but it would lose much of its significance and charm. The book tells of what did happen, not what might have happened. It is written with stern faithfulness to truth. And that is its chief quality. It is not a work of the imagination, and it was not written as fiction is written. Today, I have begun to write as a writer—creating characters I have not met in life; describing events in which I never participated.

Rodman: Reading your description of how Pavel came home to his mother, I thought of Romain Rolland. He'd have made a whole chapter out of what you put so briefly. But it's extremely interesting—and I'm a critical reader, you know. One seems to witness the making of a writer. I wonder what *Born of the Storm* will be like.

Ostrovsky: It will differ from my first book both in style and in plot construction. The reader will be interested, I hope, by the story—carried away, perhaps, by the romantic background; but the book will hardly be of such significance as *How the Steel Was Tempered*. It's entirely a work of fiction. Neither the characters nor their actions mirror actual concrete facts. It's the artist's right to illustrate the course of history, provided only he doesn't distort it.

Rodman: How many copies of *How the Steel Was Tempered* have come out, altogether?

Ostrovsky: So far, 1,500,000. But there are a few more editions still to come out this year, and that will bring the total up to 1,750,000 or perhaps 2,000,000.

Within these two-three years there have been fifty-two editions—thirty-six this year alone. Even for our vast scales, that is tremendous. The book has found its way to readers' hearts, and in particular it has won the youth, because aside from its literary merits—lacking which, it could have no effect at all—it is so sternly truthful. It has reached the people it tells about, and they have written to me. Not one of them writes of any distortion of events or characters.

All the characters, and the events in which they took part, are described as they really were, with all their good and bad sides, all their sufferings and all their joys.

Rodman: Frankly speaking, the thing that most impresses me is your devotion to the idea of Communism. Life puts a man into a situation where he can't work actively—at some plant, say, or factory. But he finds other ways of working. You have to respect a man like that. That's why I wanted to meet you. Aside from the fact that you're a splendid artist, your very life inspires the urge to work, to be useful to society, to do as you are doing. Your motto, "No surrender," leads many, very many in your footsteps. Did Rolland come to see you?

Ostrovsky: I was away from Moscow when he was there. But I hope to meet him the next time he visits the U.S.S.R.

Rodman: Some day, I'm sure, there will be a book written about you. That time has not come yet, but you're already known abroad. There's no question but that you'll establish contact with important writers. Ostrovsky will soon be known throughout the world, just as in his own country. The bourgeoisie value human courage. Your cour-

age is inspired by the spirit of Bolshevism. The bourgeoisie will be compelled to learn what Bolshevik courage means, and how the Party trains it. They will learn, from your book, to know a man loved by his whole country, a man respected and cherished by his Government.

Ostrovsky: Comrade (don't take offence at the word. It's one of the most wonderful words created by the Revolution, in the meaning that we put into it), I should like to know what your convictions are.

You represent a bourgeois newspaper. But—your personal convictions? If you are a man of courage, you will answer truthfully.

Rodman: In my five years in Moscow I've made many Communist friends, and I know they trust me. I'm known at the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs as a friendly journalist. The *News Chronicle* is a Liberal paper. I've had to drop my work on several other papers because they began to take a biased attitude towards the U.S.S.R. I came here to work because I wanted to live in the U.S.S.R., to study your life here. There can be no doubt, to me, that Communism is the next stage of civilization.

Ostrovsky: Unquestionably! But in the capitalist countries today newspapermen are compelled to lie. More, whole political parties lie, in all their activities. They can't let out the truth, for then the masses would abandon them. They're compelled to manoeuvre, trying to retain the support of two groups: the ruling group, and the toiling masses.

In our Party, eighty per cent are proletarians. They are honest workers; and they, and only they, have the right to rule the country. We're accused of destroying works of art. But you can see how base such slander is. Nowhere is art so protected as in our country. And where is Shakespeare read as he's read here? Yes—by our workers, who are called barbarians. And the question of humanity!

We've forgotten the very word, it's said. Base lies! As a matter of fact, our humane treatment of enemies has caused us many troubles. What we dream of is a new life for all mankind.

Rodman: Yes, here in Sochi a person can't help but see the Government's solicitude for the working people's health and rest.

Ostrovsky: This is only the beginning. When a wheel is just coming into motion, it can't start at 1,500 r.p.m. That comes gradually. Yet—do you remember Well's *Russia in the Shadows*? Dreamers and romanticists in the Kremlin, making up fairy tales! Strange, that a man of such vast talent and intellect should be so limited. He writes fantastic tales, looking ahead (true, distortedly) to what will happen 1,500 years from now; but he refuses to see what is actually happening in our country today.

Rodman: Rolland, Barbusse—it's what such men have to say that makes the keenest weapon, today, in discussions of Communism with intellectuals in the West. Mankind understands that you are making things work out. A Lithuanian professor visited the U.S.S.R. not long ago, as a tourist, and I had a talk with him. He hadn't been here for twenty years. People out there, he said, felt that things could never work out for the Bolsheviks, once they'd abolished private property, because there was no stimulus. But actually—he discovered—things are working out. The trains run, the hotels are open—well, and so on. More, he saw vast new construction in progress. He saw a tremendous amount of work being done to raise the cultural standards of the population. And, prejudiced against it as he'd been when he arrived, he left for home convinced that Communism is a great force. He's a professor of philosophy, and religious, and he very much disliked the reign of atheism in the U.S.S.R. The Communists, he says, follow the principles of Christiani-

ty, and whether they like it or not will certainly end as Christians.

Ostrovsky: . . . We Communists are materialists, and we realize how terrible a thing the machine of human oppression is. That machine has done its work. There was a time when capitalism performed a civilizing, a creative mission. Based on exploitation though it was, it created vast wealth. That no one can deny. But what goes on today—barrels of oil cast into the sea, and thousands of tons of coffee. . . . What can that be called but a symptom of decline, of the decay of capitalism? Paralysis has set in, and only new blood can bring further development, further creation. But where are they to get new blood, when it can only be found in Communism? Communism means rebirth for all the world. And that is a fearful thing to the ruling classes. Policy, abroad, is directed by people who ought to be in an insane asylum. One maniac is bad enough, if he gets hold of a revolver; but what are we to say of people who are capable of flinging tens of millions, their whole nation, into slaughter, of drenching the whole world in blood? How can people still fail to understand, abroad, that the U.S.S.R. doesn't aim at destruction?

Rodman: They're beginning to understand.

Ostrovsky: Are they?

Those appalling, those atrocious dictators, Hitler and Mussolini—no, History will not forget them. And that abominable monstrosity, the bourgeois press! What a situation for the journalist: he must lie for his money, or go flying out. If he's honest to the core, he'll refuse to lie; but the majority will submit. It's not easy, there, to keep your name unsullied. And that's a dreadful life to live. When newspapermen lie, they lie deliberately. They always know the truth, yet they betray it. That's prostitution. The fascists know very well what is good, and where. But they want to destroy all that is good, out of

pure hate. And the masses of the workers read their newspapers, and many believe what they read. That's the worst thing of all.

We can respect open, honest combat, with arms in hand. I've fought myself, and killed, and, when I led the line, rallied others to fight and kill. But I can't recall our ever making away with an enemy who'd surrendered, laid down his arms. Such are no longer enemies. How could our men find such warmth in their hearts towards these same people they had been fighting relentlessly only ten minutes past? Myself, I often gave them my last crumb of tobacco. There were a few cases when former Makhno men, only recently in our detachment, tried to treat prisoners badly; but we soon stopped that, and taught them our outlook.

For myself—if I were doing what I felt was wrong, I don't think I could ever manage to smile. And you know—we needed no propagandists to turn soldiers we had taken prisoner into comrades. Our men's attitude did that better than any propaganda, because it exposed the lies the prisoners' officers had told them. Such a prisoner, a Posnan peasant, say, would quickly realize that nothing threatened him; and he'd very soon be ready to join the fight on our side. But how differently the Polish officers treated captured Red Army men! Carriers of culture! How vilely they abused their prisoners—gouging out their eyes, torturing, trying to humiliate them! And Poland, in the West, was called the guardian of civilization! I saw with my own eyes how the Polish officers abused prisoners. I have every right to speak of these things, because I myself experienced them. That's why my hatred for the fascists flames so high.

I know what capitalist exploitation means. I went to work when I was eleven, working thirteen, often fifteen hours a day, and never lacking blows for thanks. Blows—not for bad work; no, I worked honestly—but because I

couldn't get as much done as my employer wanted to squeeze out of me. That's the attitude of exploiters towards working people, throughout the world. And they talk of humanity! At home, they have Wagner played for them, and Beethoven, and the thought of their victims casts no shadow on their peace of mind. Their well-being is based on their inhuman treatment of the workers, whom they describe contemptuously as uncultured. But how is a worker to attain culture, under capitalist exploitation? Isn't it the exploiters themselves that drag him back, back to the Middle Ages?

We, too, have shortcomings. But our shortcomings are remnants of the heritage the old life left us....

Rodman: What shortcomings have you in mind?

Ostrovsky: For one thing, the backwardness of the rural population. There are still many backward people in our villages. For centuries, the peasantry were compelled to live like animals, were allowed no access to knowledge, were deliberately stupefied and kept in ignorance. The people's only reading were the Gospels, yes, and tales about the devil. And when it came to the different national minorities, this policy was applied with particular consistency. It's only recently that the Kabardinian Republic, say, has rid itself of the medieval customs and rituals, and the appalling treatment of women, that reigned there in the past.

The fomentation of hatred among peoples is one of the methods of capitalist policy. It's easy enough to understand the capitalists' fear of the oppressed peoples uniting.

Rodman: I had a long talk with Litvinov, two weeks ago. He believes that Hitler is trying to hasten war against the U.S.S.R. and that war is inevitable.

Ostrovsky: Everything has changed since the October days. Tsarist Russia no longer exists. Our Army will never treat a conquered nation with cruelty. Our Red

Army men know: it's not the people of Germany that are our enemy.... We will come out the victors, will take city after city; for revolutionary armies have always been the victors in battle against reactionary armies. The struggle will be a bitter one. Hitler has made capital of the feeling of national humiliation, has used it to whip up a fearful spirit of chauvinism. That is a terrible thing. Here in our Union, there are 168 different nationalities—yet we have true brotherhood, today, among our peoples. Twenty years ago, I myself witnessed the most shocking maltreatment of Jews. Today, such things seem impossible, incredible. The Red Army, in the training of its men, devotes particular attention to political education. I was a battalion commissar myself, in 1923. Take the Poles, say: we never spoke of them as of our enemies. That would have been criminal. They are our friends, fettered and enslaved. Oppression and tyranny are not everywhere the same. There is fascism, and there is democratism; and we do not put them on the same level, though capitalism reigns in both.... Fascism is trying to strangle all that is honest, all that is noble, all that is beautiful in Germany and in Italy. And if they compel us to fight, then, of course, we'll advance in offensive against them; for the victory goes to those who advance. But we certainly don't train our Army in any spirit of conquest. And another thing: whatever the fascists' situation at the front, they'll never have peace behind their lines.

Rodman: Oh, yes, unquestionably! Even youngsters, even children know what fascism means.

Ostrovsky: Whereas we will have friends within the very first month, on whatever territory we may occupy. Our discipline is iron; our Army will never be guilty of outrages. In the Civil War, we would find gallows and traces of pogroms wherever the Whites had been, and they aroused in our men a tremendous urge for vengeance. But we never allowed it to be turned against

the unarmed population. Always, the work of the commissars prevented inhuman actions, and our men held high the honour of the scarlet standard.

Rodman: Yes, you have many friends, everywhere. That I feel and understand. And in moments of crisis, the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals will come over to your side. The workers of England, America, and France, I'm confident, will show a heartfelt desire to help the U.S.S.R. The wheels of history turn very slowly, but today they are turning faster than they ever have before.

Ostrovsky: This talk with you is particularly interesting to me. What's going on, abroad? Particularly among your colleagues, among the journalists, who know the truth, know how things really stand. With whom are their sympathies? What I have in mind are the leading ones among the English bourgeoisie. You'll understand—I'm asking as a writer.

Rodman: Most of the leading figures, and leading journalists, are fascists. Origin counts, you see. They come of the bourgeoisie, almost all of them. And the fear of losing good jobs and comfortable incomes makes fascists of them. But there are many who don't really understand what's going on. Your people attribute great importance to class origin. And they're quite right. It determines a man's way in life.

Ostrovsky: England follows a peculiar policy. I don't want to be offensive; but there's no clarity in her political stand. One can never know what she'll do next day—in which direction she'll turn, and in whose company.

Rodman: I visited Garwin, not so long ago—the publisher of the *Observer*, for which I write a weekly article. We talked six hours and more. Garwin is closely connected with Lord Astor and with Goldwyn, and he's well informed on every aspect of English policy. I described to him in great detail how things are going in the Soviet Ukraine: collectivization, and the tremendous cultural

advance among the people, and education. He says a journalist should be sincere, and write what he really feels. But I notice that my articles for the *Observer* get so doctored up before they're printed that nothing is left of what I'm trying to say, and the reader can hardly get a true idea of the U.S.S.R. Well, and when I told him what I'd seen in the Ukraine, he said that yes, the Bolsheviks had done no little, but much more could have been done under German leadership. He stands for Hitler. And not only he.

Ostrovsky: The readers of bourgeois newspapers are victims of bandits of the pen. Day after day, the papers repeat their slander of the Soviet Union—and in the end the reader begins to believe. The newspaper writers see the truth. They're the first to sense the threat of war. They know the relation of forces throughout the world. They should stop to think what sort of work they're doing, and where it's leading them.

Rodman: For me, that question has long since been decided. The Communist Party is growing, in both England and America. And many newspapermen are joining it.

Ostrovsky: That determines a man's further life. His life becomes one with the general movement. There are fine, honest hearts among the newspaper writers. And if even one out of ten leaves the camp of the exploiters with his heart untainted, that is a very joyful thing. . . .

The common cause, the common struggle give a man the strength to come through every trial. For eight years, now, I haven't been able to move, haven't been able to see. You don't know, you can't possibly realize what it means not to be able to move. That's the hardest thing of all, even when you're perfectly well, when it's not bound up with pain and suffering. Why, a person moves even in his sleep!

Rodman: Tell me—if it weren't for Communism, could you bear your situation as you do?

Ostrovsky: Never! Whereas now, my personal ill-fortune is secondary to me. And that's easily understood. . . .

Where life around him is grim and joyless, a man seeks refuge in his own, personal joys. His happiness is concentrated wholly in his family, say—within the limited horizon of purely personal interests. And when that is so, any misfortune in personal life (illness, loss of work, or the like) is liable to end in catastrophe. The man has nothing left to live for. He goes out like a candle. He has no more aim to strive for, because his aims are bounded by the limits of this purely personal life. Beyond that life, outside the home, lies a brutal world in which all men are enemies. Capitalism deliberately fosters enmity, antagonisms. It mortally fears unity among the working people. Whereas our Party fosters a deep-rooted sense of comradeship, of friendship. That is a tremendous source of moral stamina for any man—the feeling of a friendly collective of which he forms a part.

I have lost the most wonderful thing in life—the ability to see life. To that, add immeasurable pain, which never leaves me for an instant. It came as a tremendous test of will, for, believe me, I might well go mad if I let myself think about my pain. And the question arose in my mind: have I done all that it was in my power to do? But—my conscience is clear. I have lived my life honestly, have laid down my all in the struggle. Before me lie dark night, and unceasing pain. I am deprived of every physical enjoyment. The very act of taking food is torment. What can a man do in such a situation?

But the Party trains in us a sense of sacred duty: to carry on the struggle so long as a spark of life remains. Take an offensive, say. A fighter is struck down—and his only pain comes from the thought that now he cannot help his comrades in the struggle. With us, men who

were slightly wounded never left the lines. You might see a battalion advancing, and a good twenty of its men with their heads bandaged up. Such was the tradition that grew up in our struggle, the feeling of pride that we were trained in. Abroad, all sorts of counts and barons pride themselves on their ancient descent. We proletarians have a pride of our own. And when a comrade today recalls that he was once a stoker, he recalls it with pride. In your world, it would mean nothing. Workers there are nobody.

I've always been very proud—bore no injury silently, allowed no one to insult me. No one was ever able to make a slave of me. I worked fifteen, eighteen hours a day—worked honestly, spoiled no machines. But if anyone raised his hand against me, I would fight. *How the Steel Was Tempered* is the whole story of my life—step by step, year by year.

Rodman: Tell me—who has visited you, of prominent Western writers?

Ostrovsky: It's only recently, you see, that I began to write, and only very recently that my book began to come out in such huge printings. When I get back to Moscow, there will be many talks with writers from abroad. And—certainly—Rolland.

Rodman: When did you receive the Order of Lenin?

Ostrovsky: A year ago tomorrow.

Rodman: Is it true that the manuscript of your first book was lost?

Ostrovsky: Yes—such a tremendous amount of work! I was inexperienced, and sent off my only copy.

Rodman: Where will you be staying in Moscow?

Ostrovsky: I have rooms there—at the very heart of the city, so I won't be isolated from my comrades. But not many know just where. You see, a tremendous feeling for me has grown up among our country's youth, and young people are very eager to visit me. But I'm not

strong enough to receive so much as a tenth of those who want to see me.

Rodman: How do you secure yourself against such visits here in Sochi?

Ostrovsky: The comrades proposed setting up a guard. But I wouldn't hear of that. If I can't meet everyone personally, let my home, at least, be open for all. Let the young people come and see how he lives—that adventurous and ever-cheerful fellow. I can't shut myself away from my readers.

Rodman: What reading do you do?

Ostrovsky: All our chief newspapers, and the most important fiction. I have to study. Life progresses, and I must not lag behind. Reading takes up several hours of my day.

Rodman: And your health?

Ostrovsky: If you asked my doctor, he'd say, "For thirty years I've thought only those were ill who complained of illness. But this fellow—you would never think him ill. And yet his heart is ruined, his nerves strained to breaking point, his whole system weakened appallingly. He should do absolutely nothing for the next three years, nothing but eat and sleep. And no reading but Anatole France and Mark Twain—and that in the smallest doses." Yet I work, work fifteen hours a day. How? The doctors can't understand it. But there's nothing supernatural about it. Objectively, of course, I'm ill. I suffer racking pain, that never leaves me day or night.

Rodman: How much sleep do you get?

Ostrovsky: Seven to eight hours a day.

Rodman: What were you doing when your illness began?

Ostrovsky: I was a political functionary—secretary of a Young Communist League district committee. And that meant work from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. No time at all for yourself.

Yes, I was a district functionary. After the Civil War I went back to the railway shops. That was in 1921. I worked there as an electrician up to 1923. Then, in 1923, I went back to the border, because I wasn't able to work in the shops any longer. I fooled the doctors, and they passed me for the Army. I was a commissar in the Army for a year. Then, up to 1927—a Young Communist League functionary. And I was ill all that time. In 1927, my illness put me altogether out of commission. I first joined the Army in 1919, at the age of fifteen. It was in the Army that I joined the Young Communist League.

Rodman: I've met a lot of people. Prominent people, too, and very interesting. I've talked with Litvinov, as I've said before. But I must say that this talk with you has taught me a great deal. I shall never forget it.

You're a courageous man. Your courage rises from your devotion to the ideas of Communism. It's courage inspired by principle, Communist courage. Isn't that so?

Ostrovsky: Yes. I know that any moment may be my last. When you leave me now, a telegram announcing my death may follow on your heels. That doesn't frighten me. That's why I work as I do, regardless of risk. Were I well, I'd use my strength more economically, so that I might accomplish more. But I live at the edge of the precipice, and any moment may send me flying down. That I know well. Two months ago, I had a bilious attack, and it was pure chance it didn't kill me. But just as soon as the fever dropped I set to work. And I kept at it twenty hours a day, because I was afraid I might die before my book was finished.

I feel that my life is on the wane, and I must make the most of every minute left me—while my heart is still aflame, and my mind still lucid. Death is stalking me, and that intensifies my eagerness for life. This is no matter of brief, momentary heroism. I've conquered every tragedy life has brought me: blindness, immobility, in-

credible physical pain. And I'm a very happy man, in spite of everything. No—not simply in the sense that I've become successful, that I've been decorated by our Government. Before all that, I was no less cheerful. It was never material success that I strove for in my work. I want you to understand that. Were I to find myself tomorrow back in the bare little room where my work began, it would matter nothing to me.

Rodman: When did the Party begin to take an interest in you?

Ostrovsky: I never felt myself neglected. I was provided a pension; I received medical treatment at sanatoriums and at the best Moscow clinics; I went through nine operations. But I always refused any special grants, because I had enough to live on. And in 1932 I rejoined the ranks—when my book won recognition. The first part came out in 1932, and the second in 1934.

Rodman: Why did you name the book as you did?

Ostrovsky: Steel is tempered by great heat and sudden cooling. That makes it strong, so that nothing can break it. And that's how our generation was tempered—in struggle and in frightful ordeals. That's how we learned to stand against life's attacks.

I was only semi-literate. Up to 1924, I didn't know Russian properly. But I studied, worked tremendously hard. And I became an intellectual. I had no real knowledge to start with, except for my political training. That was enough for me, in those early days. I did most of my studying after I fell ill—because, being ill, I had the time for it. I would read twenty hours out of the twenty-four. In six years of immobility I read through a tremendous number of books.

Rodman: I'm very grateful to you for this talk. I hope I shall meet you again, in Moscow.

Ostrovsky: I should like to think that our talk today

will leave your heart really warm. We are a trustful people.

Rodman: Not exactly. Your people are more cautious now, less trustful of all and sundry. And that's a good thing. A necessary thing—though I do suffer, at times, because I feel I'm not entirely trusted. You must be always on the alert.

Ostrovsky: I have a tremendous urge to trust people, to regard them as good and honest friends. Did I represent the bourgeoisie, I couldn't expect people to respect or trust me; but I am one of those who work, and therefore I feel that I have the right to everyone's respect. We in our country are working to create a new world. In your country, too, many have come to understand that now.

Rodman: An acquaintance of mine was invited here from England by Otto Yuliевич Schmidt.* He plans to write a book about the Arctic. He went North, and one day, up there, he had a talk with some sailors. They asked him for what publisher he was writing his book.

"For a bourgeois publisher," he told them.

"But that means your book will be against the Soviet system," they said. "It will have to criticize our system, or it won't be published. Then how is it you call yourself a friend of the U.S.S.R.?"

And he could not prove himself a friend of the U.S.S.R. The masses today demand friendship that is real. If you call yourself a friend, prove yourself one!

Ostrovsky: If you've maintained your honesty and human dignity—that's no little. After all, there's much that you can't easily understand. You didn't know pre-revolutionary Russia. You can't conceive of those appalling, those infernal conditions. Only one who knows our

*Otto Yuliевич Schmidt—a prominent Soviet scientist and Polar explorer.—*Ed.*

frightful past can realize and properly evaluate the vast work we've already done.

And it's dreadful to think that there are people in the world who would like to smash all we've achieved, to wreck it all, and plunge us again into the old slavery.

I hope you will maintain your position of honesty. That is often a risky thing. It demands courage.

You must realize that we had reason for rising in rebellion; that the workers had every right to cast down their enslavers, to do away with slavery, to build our splendid new life of liberty. And there are people who want to destroy all this, who are preparing new world war.

Rodman: We'll find the right way. I'm convinced of that. I should like you to know that I shall write about Nikolai Ostrovsky, about my talk with you, for newspapers in England and America....

THERE CAN BE NOTHING MORE JOYOUS THAN LABOUR

Talk with a *Pravda* correspondent
Sochi, October 1936

Some days ago, I finished the first book of my novel *Born of the Storm* (13 signatures).

Altogether, the novel will consist of three books.

In another few days, as soon as my "vacation" ends, I shall start work on Book Two.

Deep in my heart, I hope to finish all three by the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. But that, unfortunately, I cannot promise, because what a Bolshevik promises, he must do. And my treacherous health is always liable to cancel any date that I may set. The greater the joy, then, if my hopes really come true.

There is a widespread belief, even to this day, that poets and writers can only work in moments of inspiration. Perhaps that is the reason why some writers do nothing for years on end—waiting for inspiration!

Inspiration comes in the process of labour. Of that I am firmly convinced. A writer must work, work honestly, like all the other builders of our country—work whatever the weather, and whatever his mood. For labour is a balsam for all ills.

There can be nothing more joyous than labour.

This vacation I have been ordered to take*—I am looking forward impatiently to its end, when I can get down to work again.

You ask about my plans, besides *Born of the Storm*. You must not ask me such heart-stirring questions. I'm liable to forget myself, and pour forth such fantastic hopes as will take you altogether aback.

I should like to write a children's story. Then a try at scientific fiction, and after that the last book of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. That I would call, *Korchagin's Happiness*. And, at the same time, I want to study—both intensively and extensively. Yes, study to the last day I live.

That is no paradox. It is necessity. Well, and to carry through all these plans, I need to live another ten years, at the very least.

I wonder what the doctors would say to that! To tell you the truth, I would very much like to break all records of longevity. Life is so wonderful, in this land of ours!

* In his eagerness to finish *Born of the Storm*, Ostrovsky refused even to hear of a pause, however brief. But the state of his health made rest essential. And the Sochi Party Committee, by official decision, bound him—in obedience to Party discipline—to put away his work and take six weeks' vacation.—*Ed.*

MY DREAMS

Talk with S. Tregub, manager of the literary department
of the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*

November 1936

(An incomplete record)

Tregub: What are your dreams?

Ostrovsky: I could fill ten volumes, and not express them all. I'm always dreaming, from morning to night, yes, and even in the night. Of what? It would be hard to say. It's not some one dull dream, coming day after day and month after month. It's always changing—like the sunrise, or sunset. . . . Dreaming, to me, is one of the most wonderful ways I know of renewal. I use up a tremendous amount of energy—well, and I begin to run down, like a used-up battery. Then I must find sources of new energy, something to rally all my strength. My dreams—they may sometimes seem fantastic; but they are always of life, of the earth. I never dream of the impossible.

. . . If I might multiply my country's, our Republic's might! And never is that craving greater than when I begin to dream. If one could take all the capitalists' billions, all their machines—all that lies useless, motionless in their hands; if one could bring their workers, starving, toilworn, reduced to the extremes of poverty and suffering—if one could bring them here and give them work and life! I can see the ship, bringing them here to us. I see the joyful meeting, see the people free and happy.

Dreams know no bounds. . . .

Often, a spark will flare, in some cranny of my brain, and then my vision will grow and spread into a great, victorious advance. Such dreams do me so much good! Love, personal happiness—there is little room in my dreams for these. A man does not lie to his own self. There can be no happiness for me beyond the happiness

that comes to the fighter. All that is purely personal is transitory. It can never attain such vast scope as that which concerns society as a whole. And it is life's most honourable task, life's most honourable goal, for me, to be a fighter, and not the least of fighters, in the struggle for man's most glorious happiness. Yes, I am in duty bound to take my place as a leader in the fight. I never see myself, in my dreams, as one of those who merely carry out orders.

I shall never be able to put all this into words. Such wonderful, such deeply moving thoughts—no one can possibly express them properly.

Sometimes, talking to me, some slobbering idiot begins to complain that his wife is unfaithful, say, and now he has nothing to live for, nothing left to him in life, and all that sort of rot. And I think to myself, if I had what that man has: his health, his arms and legs, his ability to move about the boundless world we live in (that is a dangerous dream, and I don't allow myself to dream it)—if I had what that man has, what then? **And** in my thoughts I get up, young, strong, erect. I dress, and go out on to the balcony, and life lies there before me.... What then? No, I couldn't simply walk. I'd race headlong—I couldn't help it! I'd race off to Moscow, maybe—running all the way beside the train. And in Moscow I'd go to the Stalin Motor Works, and make straight for the furnaces, and open a furnace door, just as fast as I could, to get a whiff of the coal smell, and feed the furnace full. Oh, I'd do sixty, seventy days' work in one. I'd get more work out of myself than anyone could believe. I'd be so greedy to live, so mad to live. How much I could get done, how much energy I'd have to spend, before I tired! Released from immobility, nine years of immobility—why, I could never sit still, could never stop work until I'd sated my longing for it.

That's what I think to myself, when a man comes to me and slobbers like an idiot, and whines that he has nothing to live for. If I could have what he has, let my wife deceive me fifty times over—I'd still be happy, and feel always what a wonderful thing life is!

In our country, it's a man's sacred duty to be a hero. In our country, everyone is gifted, talented—everyone but the lazy, the idlers. They don't want to be gifted. And nothingness can yield only nothingness. Water won't flow under a stone. If you don't blaze, you go to waste in smoke. That is always true. Hail, the flame of life!

And—never you think that I'm an unhappy man, a melancholy fellow. No, that I've never been. Until I won out to victory, I was always full of the stubborn determination—no surrender! I was deep in obstinate struggle. And, after all, I could not know that life would take this turn. What happiness I derived from my youth study circle! I was stronger, then. I could speak for three hours on end, and my twenty young people would never stir until I finished. They would hardly breathe. So that the flame is there. And something to live for, too—the knowledge that I'm needed. If you can't teach hundreds, teach five—teach even one. That's no little thing—to train five Bolsheviks. No little thing.

But when a man feels that he's lost the desire to work—then it's time for him to worry.

The egoist is the easiest to down. He lives within himself, and for himself. And once his ego is hurt, he has nothing to live by. He sees nothing before him but the dark night of egoism and doom. Whereas a man who lives not only for himself, a man who merges himself with the life of society—such a man is hard to down. To kill him, you have to kill all that surrounds him, to destroy his country, to destroy all life. I have been injured—but my detachment lives and flourishes. And the fighter fallen in battle—his detachment's shout of victory, reaching his

dying ear, brings him a sense of final, of lofty satisfaction. There can be nothing more fearful to the fighter than the thought that he has betrayed—that he has brought his detachment to destruction. To his dying day, he will bear the searing burden of treachery.

There will be personal misunderstandings, unhappinesses, under Communism too. But people will not limit themselves to their own narrow, personal lives. And life will be beautiful.

Our comrades—theirs is no momentary heroism. Personal sufferings, to them, are secondary. Tragedy begins when struggle ceases.

Every day of life, to me, is a day of struggle against tremendous pain and suffering. That has been so for ten years—ten years of life. Yet you see me smile, and my smile is sincere and happy. In spite of all my sufferings, my life is full of the tremendous joy that comes of our country's victories. There is nothing more joyous than victory over pain and suffering. I don't mean simply breathing, remaining alive (though that is wonderful, too). What I mean is, struggle and victory.

I got here from Moscow ill and tired. I had been working too hard. But my illness did not undermine my energy. It rallied it. "Remember," I told myself, "you may die tomorrow. Work, while you still can!"

And I threw myself into my work. I amazed everyone around me. I worked eagerly, joyously.

I despise a man who will let a festered finger throw him off balance, who can put his wife's whims before the Revolution, who is ready to smash all the windows and dishes in the house out of crude jealousy.

Or a poet who sighs and suffers by the hour, seeking something to write about—and, once he's found it, can't get down to writing, because his mood isn't right, or he's caught cold, perhaps, and his nose is running. The sort that goes about with his throat wrapped up, in fear and

trembling lest he get into a draught. And if his temperature goes up a bit, he's panic-struck, begins to sniffle and write his will. Don't be so panicky, comrade! Stop thinking about your cold. Get to work, and your cold will go.

Or take a writer—the man's as strong as an ox!—who's been living for the last three years by reading one and the same fragment of some unfinished book to readers' audiences. Two hundred and fifty rubles for every reading! "There's still fools aplenty," he says, and laughs. "I needn't write a word for the next six years." He hasn't the time to write. He's too busy eating, sleeping, and running after women—any women, beautiful or unbeautiful, of any age from seventeen to seventy. Health—that he has; but there is no flame in his heart.

There are splendid orators I know of. They can draw the most wonderful word pictures, calling on their hearers to live nobly and well. But they themselves don't live that way. From the platform, they exhort their hearers to great deeds—but they themselves live like sons of bitches. Imagine a thief who preaches honesty, who cries that it is evil to steal—and, while he speaks, scans his listeners to see whose pocket he can pick most easily. Or imagine a deserter, fled from the field of battle, calling on honest fighters to volunteer. Our fighters have no mercy for that sort. If they find him out, they will beat him half dead. And there are those among our writers, too, whose lives contradict their words. That is altogether incompatible with the writer's calling.

The writer's tragedy comes when his thoughts, the finest, the most vivid, elude the pen; when his heart is aflame, yet what he sets down on paper is no more than faint, smouldering embers. The material with which the writer works offers a resistance rarely elsewhere met.

I am beginning really to love my new characters, the young folk of *Born of the Storm*: Rajmond, and reckless

Andri, and that fine, quiet lad, Prenicek, and buxom, lovable Olesya, and beautiful Sarah—that splendid revolutionary. I love them all. I think of them constantly, and, for some of them, I can already see what the future holds in store.

Olesya will promise to marry Shchabel, brave division commander, who comes to overshadow Andri in her heart. But she will say to him, "I'll be yours when the war is over, not before." And one day Shchabel will get drunk, and break his faith to her. This Olesya cannot forgive. And then again she will encounter Andri—come out alive, by pure chance, from battles in which, despairing at the loss of Olesya, he has vainly sought death. And these two will go on into life together. Prenicek—his story is unusual, and full of interest. He loses a leg in battle, and becomes a burden to his detachment. No longer a fighter, he begins to feel that he is of no more use in life. And then, in the spring, at the mill where he is working, he meets Franciszka, who takes him into her warm woman's heart, gives him her love. But it is not for long that she remains with him. Her feminine pride is too deeply touched when people look pityingly at her and at her lover. And so she leaves him. Prenicek is drawn instinctively to his old detachment. He begs the partisans to take him back, but they only laugh. "Herd geese," they tell him. "We must fight. What can we do with you?" Still, he persuades them to take him in, if only to cook their meals. He is a pastry-cook, after all, by trade. They take him to their shelter, and he begins to cook for them, and bakes them apple tarts, delicious tarts, such as none of the partisans have ever tasted before. He becomes a universal favourite. But his heart is the heart of the fighter. He cannot reconcile himself to this sort of life. He cleans the machine-guns for the men, and helps to dismount and assemble them. He gets to know the guns so well that he can dismount and assemble them with his eyes shut.

And, as time passes, he becomes a machine-gunner, the terror of the enemy. People begin to sing the glory of the one-legged machine-gunner who knows no fear, who never fails to rout the foe. He is twice decorated. He no longer swings along on crutches. An artificial limb has been made for him. Again he meets Franciszka, in the glory of victory, and she returns to him. Such are the first rough outlines of my characters' fates and interrelations.

A diary? No, I can't keep one. A diary must hold everything, down to the stirrings of love, down to the most secret dreams. Essentially, it's a conversation with oneself, absolutely frank and honest. That requires no little courage. Writing a diary with an eye to future publication, for history—that I consider contemptible. It won't be a diary. It will be a literary composition. I couldn't help but keep a diary, could I write it myself. But I can never (nor can anyone!) entrust my very inmost self to anyone else's hand. There are things that it's not easy to admit, even to oneself. There are feelings that can't be thrown open, just as one can't come before people nude, unclothed. It may, perhaps, be beautiful—this nudity; but it remains impossible. There are so many desires and feelings, deep in one's heart—feelings that can't always be entrusted even to a diary. But—if the discord between a man's inner world and the world about him grows too great, it's time he paused awhile and asked himself, "What sort of man am I, if I have thoughts that I'm ashamed to admit even to myself?"

There should be nothing in a man's life so shameful that he cannot write it down. Such a diary is an essential thing. It helps tremendously in moulding one's own character. Furmanov's diary, and his rough sketches, are a great treasure.*

* Dmitri Furmanov's famed novel *Chapayev* is based in large measure on diaries in which Furmanov noted thoughts, events, impressions, through the years of Civil War.—Ed.

TURN THE BIG GUNS ON ME!

From the stenographic record of a meeting
of the Presidium of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union
called to discuss the first book of the novel

Born of the Storm

November 15, 1936

It will surprise you, perhaps, that I speak now—that the author should be the first speaker.

I have been awaiting this meeting with a feeling of great trust that it will help me in many things.

I have one urgent request to make, a request I have many times repeated in letters to the comrades and in talks with them: that our discussion take the following lines, for my benefit and our common good.

Point out to me, with Bolshevik truth—severely, rigorously, if need be—every shortcoming, every deficiency in my work. Circumstances compel me to particular urgency in my appeal for rigorous criticism. The comrades know my life, and all that distinguishes it from other lives. And I am afraid this knowledge may tend to hinder severe criticism. That should not be so. Every one of you knows how hard it is to remake a book from its foundation. But if that is necessary, it must be done.

I earnestly request you not to treat me as a beginner in literature. I have been writing for six years, and that is time enough for me to have learned something of writing. Keep your demands high, very high. That is the main thing I want to say to you. Treat me as a writer who answers for his work in fullest measure—answers both as an artist and as a Communist. Quality, artistry, value—such are the demands our mighty people present to the works of our Soviet writers. And it must be a matter of honour to us to meet these just demands.

We no longer have Gorky with us—that great writer

and most wonderful man, impassioned and relentless battler against vulgarity, against mediocrity, in literature. And this loss brings home to the Party group of the Writers' Union, brings home to every Party member and every non-Party Bolshevik writer, more profoundly than ever before, the responsibility each of us bears for the work we all are doing.

And in this connection I should like to say a few words about our concept of friendship. I came into Soviet literature from the ranks of the Young Communist League. The traditions of our Party and League offer unparalleled examples of friendship in creative work: examples that teach us to respect our own labour and the labour of our comrades; that show us friendship as lying above all in frankness, sincerity, in criticism of our comrades' errors. True friends must be the first to criticize, and criticize rigorously, so that their comrade may correct his errors. Failing that, he will inevitably be put right by his readers, who have no desire to read badly written books.

We must build it up, this splendid friendship, among us writers; for there are still remnants among us of the atmosphere come down from the old days, when the writer was a "lone wolf."

It is time we shook hands, frankly, honestly, and cast aside for good all the poisonous, splenetic remnants of past groupings and conflicts, of wrong methods of criticism, wrong methods of argument—of the period when group interests were set above the interests of Soviet literature.

Among us, too, there are people of the type that the great Stalin has called "honest drivellers"—people who prate endlessly, but do not work; whereas, in our country, the writer's first duty is to work—to work over his books, and to work towards his own improvement. And then there is another type—the "literary borers." These recognize no merit, no prestige. They speak contemptu-

ously of our country's foremost writers, call them by spiteful nicknames, spread rotten jokes and gossip, and all sorts of filth, about them. This sort are not simply drivellers. They are a worse evil. We must launch a relentless struggle against such gossip-mongers, rumour-bearers. What we need is a good, fresh wind, to winnow out such chaff.

Our meeting today follows upon a recent meeting of the Presidium of the Soviet Writers' Union devoted to the work of another of our writers. It is my hope that this meeting will keep to the same high level of discussion.

You have all read the first book of my novel *Born of the Storm*. It represents two and a half years of work. Let the talk be of its mistakes. That will unite us; for is it not our common aim that Soviet literature be the best, the finest? Truthful and unsparing criticism helps the writer to develop. It is an ennobling influence. Only vain and limited people cannot endure it. Let us share our anxieties and alarms, tell one another openly where we have failed. . . . I request you to treat me as a fighter, willing and able to correct the shortcomings in his work. Criticism will not unman me. No, it will prove to me that I am among friends, who will help me to conquer my difficulties. I have not yet mastered our art too well—that I never forget; and I have much to learn from you. The artist must feel our firm, Soviet ground under his feet. He must never lose his contact with it. One can only pity a man who tears away from the collective, who imagines himself some sort of super-genius, or unrecognized talent. The collective will always raise a man, set him firmly on his feet.

I shall be listening anxiously to what you have to say. But remember my request: take the line of greatest resistance, the line of maximum demand.

Turn the big guns on me. That will only increase my strength, intensify my will to get to work immediately and finish properly this first book of my new novel.

You will forgive me if I have not been able to formulate my thoughts as clearly as I should.

I can outline for you briefly the situation in which my characters will continue their struggle. The first book, as you know, is laid in a corner of the Ukraine, at the end of 1918. It describes the evacuation of the German troops, and the struggle of the working class and the peasantry against the Polish landowners and the bourgeoisie.

The second book will deal with the gathering of the Pilsudski forces, their seizure of a part of the Ukraine, and their bloc with Petlura, who in the end sold out to them completely; and, on the other side of the barricades—the organization of the Red Army out of small partisan detachments, the struggle of the peasantry against the landlords, the spontaneous uprisings which grew, under Bolshevik leadership, into a movement of the entire people against the foreign invaders, and the Red Army's victories over Petlura's bands.

The third book will show the intervention, now altogether unmasked, launched by the Entente as represented by landlord-and-capitalist Poland. The heroic resistance put up by the Twelfth Army—ragged, half barefoot, small in number. Thirteen thousand, as against sixty thousand warmly dressed and splendidly armed Polish soldiers.

The Poles seize Kiev. The Polish bourgeoisie are triumphant. But the steel fist of the Cavalry Army gathers near Uman. A blow of frightful force—and the Poles retreat.

Our victorious offensive, and the expulsion of the interventionists from the Ukraine. The book will show the fascists' vandalism. Destruction of beautiful buildings, of splendid bridges. Senseless, barbarous annihilation of

all that comes to hand. Villages razed by fire, railway lines and stations blown into the air. The blood-stained path of the bestial Whiteguards—"defenders of culture."

Such is the background against which I plan to portray the struggle of my youthful characters, under Bolshevik guidance, for the liberation of our Motherland. With the development of events, I shall show how this heroic group of young workers, Communists and Young Communist Leaguers, matured and grew steeled in bitter struggle.

There you have the outline of the book as a whole. I have said nothing, as you see, concerning the fates of individual characters. If necessary, I can outline those as well.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The comrades are right in saying that the book should come out quickly. But I must work over it first, in the light of this meeting, which—I shall be quite frank with you—has given me a clear and concrete understanding of much that must be done. I have been following your suggestions with the greatest attention.

I very much liked Comrade Gerasimova's speech. She expressed important thoughts, with splendid clarity.

And now, as to the book:

The need for additional work on the manuscript is clear. I understand Stavsky's remarks, and those of the other comrades. The book has not been judged a failure—a judgement, if it came, which I should have received with the same courage as all those shocks and failures that life brings to the real fighter.

We know that victory is not won easily, that the way to victory is not smooth. There have been no such victories in history, or almost none. Our country's victory, the victories gained by any one of us—all come as the result of obstacles overcome.

Had it been clearly demonstrated today (and I am sensitive to such things; I need no long persuasion)—had it been decided today that my book was a failure, there could have been only one result: I should have set furiously to work again tomorrow morning. That is not mere talk, mere fine words. Life without struggle, to me, is not life. The devil I need my life, if I'm to live it for nothing else than to be alive! Life means struggle.

When Kolosov told me that *How the Steel Was Tempered* should be worked over thoroughly, I did not refuse to work it over, though that was tremendously difficult for me at the time, because I was very weak after a bad case of pneumonia.

I understand, now, where the main shortcomings of my new book lie. And another thing I've come to understand: that meetings such as this today are not a waste of time.

Tomorrow I rest—I shall permit myself that luxury. The day after tomorrow, I shall go over your remarks again, study them thoroughly and then set to work on the passages that need revision, as Stavsky put it. Three months of steady work, I think, should get that done. But three months can be cut down to one, by working in three shifts. I suffer with insomnia, and that will help. Some treat their illnesses by rest, others—by work. One month from now, I hope to turn in to the Central Committee of the Young Communist League a manuscript which, perhaps, will earn acceptance.

Most of your remarks will be of great help in my work on the second book as well; for what we have discussed here is only a third of the novel as I plan it. Now I can get down to work, keeping all that you have said, your friendly criticism, in mind. And the comrades who expressed the wish that the book come out as soon as possible, will be satisfied.

In a month, then, the League Central Committee should get the first book of the novel *Born of the Storm*, relieved

of the shortcomings we have discussed today. But there is one thing—and the comrades, writers all, will understand me: a writer must rework his book himself. He himself must think over and do over whatever needs correction. No writer who has any feeling for his book can turn it over for “finishing” to anyone else, be that someone else however greatly gifted. That should be clear enough to anyone.

If you came to a “five hundred” team* in the middle of the season and said, “Let me do the digging for you,” I can assure you they would never agree. “We’ll finish up ourselves,” they’d surely tell you.

I do not mean by this to belittle in any way the value of the remarks that have been made here. They will help me greatly to improve my book. But I must do this work myself.

Yes, I do need a competent editor. That is true. That would eliminate such mistakes as the “emerald tear” that lasted through forty editions of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

A simple working man, I overlooked the fact that emeralds are green. That was a childish mistake. But it was written six years ago.

The League Central Committee counts me an active League member. In all my years in the League, I have never had to be reprimanded for negligence, or for failure to carry out Central Committee directives. And I will carry out this task, too, as quickly as I can. I am quite serious about it. The book needs to be improved by several degrees, so that I can come out with it and not be ashamed. Many people consider that a writer’s first book is his most vivid work, and most profound, because he puts all

* The reference is to a mass movement in emulation of the work of Maria Demchenko and Marina Gnatenko, young collective-farm girls who, with their teams, in 1935, grew a record sugar-beet harvest of 500 centners per hectare.—Ed.

he has learned in life into it; and that a second book is more difficult to write. I shall think and work over all your remarks, dear friends. We should have more such friendly gatherings.

I was deeply touched by all that Alexander Serafimovich said, and Fadeyev, and Aseyev, and Valeria Gerasimova. My only comment is, that you should have criticized more severely. Comrade Aseyev made some progress in that respect.

Any one of us, alone, may make mistakes. However talented a man may be, the collective will always be wiser, and stronger.

Let me thank you, dear friends, for your remarks today, clear and precise and truthful. Now we are acquainted. Now Comrade Gerasimova is alive for me. And Fadeyev too. I had always felt their presence in our struggle, in our construction, but I had never met them personally.

The second book of my novel, I hope, will also be discussed in this way; and then the artillery fire will be less hesitating.

And now, dear comrades—many, many thanks for this most helpful talk.

Letters

EXK3

TO HIS FAMILY

Kharkov, March 23, 1925

Dear people,

Your letter came some time ago, but I couldn't answer because of the treatments the doctors have been giving me.

Dear Father, I'm terribly sorry about your arm. I hope you're taking care so that it won't get worse. I'm awfully sorry, my own dear Father! When a letter comes from home, nowadays, I always look for the three signatures—Mother's, Katya's,* and yours. Don't forget to join in every letter, if it's only a few words.

They're treating me now with the most drastic medicines, and so, of course, the results are showing fast. The swelling in my legs has already come down a little. True, it's a little painful, but that doesn't matter. I've just had an injection of iodoform, and a host of other medicines with it, and so I'm not feeling too well at the moment. In any case, I'm beginning to hope that perhaps I'll be able to join you at home by the end of the year—and I hadn't much hope of that before. Perhaps I'll be that lucky!

So there you are. Write more about yourselves, and tell Mitya** to write too. I'm always waiting for letters. Well,

* Katya—Ostrovsky's sister, Ekaterina Alexeyevna Ostrovskaya.—*Ed.*

** Mitya—his brother, Dmitri Alexeyevich Ostrovsky, portrayed in *How the Steel Was Tempered* as Pavel Korchagin's elder brother, Artem.—*Ed.*

no more now. Next time! Regards to all, and to the neighbours.

Goodbye, then.

Your loving son,

Kolya

Do write. I want to hear from you. I'm enclosing three stamps for Mother.

TO HIS FATHER

Kharkov, April 8, 1925

Dear Father of mine,

Dear old man, I'm writing to tell you how I'm getting on, and what lies ahead. Just now, as I've already written, they're treating me with injections of iodine and other medicines, into the joints of both knees. The injections are very painful. I'm feverish for three or four days, and then— injections again, and it starts all over. This is a drastic cure. It's hard to stand, but it's the only thing that has seemed to help. The swelling has gone down greatly. There's not much of it left. As I'm very weak, they're thinking of sending me to a health resort. The season begins on May 15. I'll soon know just how things stand. The Professor has reported that I really need it, and we're turning in an application. And so, dear Father, if luck is with me, I'll get better and come back to work in our dear Party, and help you, too. Often, in your letters, I find grievous words that tell me you're in need. That's very grievous to me. Dear Father and Mother, I give you my word. Just you hold out a little longer, till I get back. By the end of the year, maybe. And then things will be easier. I'll be able to give you all the help you

need. I'll turn over everything to you, everything, my dear old man. I don't need anything for myself. I'm a Communist.

Greetings,

Kolya

TO HIS BROTHER

Kharkov, April 15, 1925

Dear, good, beloved brother of mine, Mitya,

Your letter came yesterday, and I'm answering at once.

You write so sadly, with such warm, brotherly feeling. You always felt so, and always will, I know.

Dear Mitya, I can feel again, in your letter, the real brotherly love you have for me. Thanks, dear brother!

You know—I must tell you, things are not really so bad with me as you were told. This business about cutting off my legs—that was before Professor Vagner got back. He'd been away in Germany. His assistants had the idea it might have to be done, if nothing else helped. I'd never have let them do it, of course. Why, that would leave me altogether helpless. But that was a long time ago—five months, now. They're giving me a new kind of treatment now, and the swelling is almost all gone. Just the least bit left. I'll have my last injection today, because that's all the treatment allows. Yes—I've news to tell you. They're sending me to a health resort. The Professor says I have to go. I was examined yesterday at the resort commission, and they'll tell me tomorrow where I'm going. Our Professor works at the Slavyansk resort every year, beginning May 15. He's in charge of the surgical department there. And he wants me sent there, so he can keep an eye on me. He gave me a recommendation to the commission, asking them to send me to Slavyansk, and I

suppose that's where I'll go. They let me get out of bed for the commission, a couple of days earlier than I was supposed to. I'll be able to walk.

See how well things are going, dear Mitya. All I'd been hoping for is coming true. And I may be staying three months at the resort, instead of one. The Professor says, "I'll keep you there just as long as you need it." So that all's well, dear brother. And as far as my legs are concerned, there can be no question of cutting them off. And won't I rest, though! There's another comrade going with me, a Party member and a good friend of mine. We're being sent to the same place. And afterwards, dear Mitya, there's some hope, not altogether hollow, that I may come home to you all entirely well.

Dear brother, how I want to see you, and get back to work beside you! Tell our people—Father, and Mother, and everyone—how things stand with me. And you know —when I get back home (by the end of the year, maybe), the Central Committee promises a little money, 150 or 200 rubles. So that I'll be provided for at the first, and then I'll be able to work. I want you to know, dear brother, that I never conceal anything from you, and I never will. And I give you my word as a Communist that things are getting brighter for me.

I'll write you everything.

Your *Kolya*

TO A. P. DAVIDOVA*

[*Yevpatoria*] July 3, 1926

Dearest Galka,

I've taken some time about writing to you. You know the reason.... Now I can sum up the position.

* Anna Pavlovna Davidova—a nurse at the Medico-Mechanical Research Institute in Kharkov, where Ostrovsky received treatment in 1925.—Ed.

The doctors say I need another month here. They've sent their decision to the Central Committee, and I'm staying on, so far, waiting for the answer.

The mud treatments are over, and now I can be transferred to a different sanatorium, right at the sea-side, and take sun baths on the beach. It will be more cheerful there. The sea is not so grey as it seems here.

But my health is no better. As might have been expected, I confess, the mud treatment made my spine ache terribly. They X-rayed it, and—a clear case of spondylitis of the second vertebra.

An unasked-for business, as you will understand. One more complication. Another twist of the helm. I seem to be better than most at digging up new troubles for myself—don't you agree? It won't be long, I suppose, before something else turns up, and so on endlessly....

... And back again to current events—the struggle for life, for a return to work. A terribly difficult front, sapping all the vigour that it costs me such effort to rally. It's using up so much of my strength!

Who wins? That's not settled yet, though the enemy (my illness) has brought up strong reinforcements (spondylitis).

Write about yourself. I'll be expecting news from you. Will write more later.

Kolya

TO A. P. DAVIDOVA

[Novorossiisk] July 18, 1926

Dear Galochka,

A letter from you at last. I was beginning to think you'd forgotten me, and didn't want to write. I wrote you twice, you know—sent one letter to the Institute, and the other to Zmiyevskaya Street—and not a word from you!

I wrote Novikov, the other day, to give you a friendly calling-down if he met you.

Oh, well, let bygones be bygones."

About myself. My health, I'm sorry to say, is definitely getting worse—slowly, gradually, but surely. Not long ago, I lost command of my left arm and shoulder. I already had ankylosis of the right shoulder joint—that you know. Now the left is gone, too. It ached and ached, and then it stiffened past all moving.

I can't even comb my own hair any longer—not to speak of anything else. And now my left hip is inflamed and painful, and I can hardly manage to move my leg sideways. It will stiffen entirely very soon, no doubt of it. I'm losing the power to move in every joint, even the ones I could still control only a short while back. It's complete ossification.

You understand well enough what that means. I understand it, too. Yet I can only lie and watch, while sickness robs me bit by bit of the last hope of getting about somehow on my own legs. And no help for it! What can a person do to stop this persistent disease, that's gaining on me so rapidly? The ache in my spine is not only at the waist, now, but higher up as well—the sixth vertebra. So that it's one of two things, I suppose. Either spondylitis in another vertebra, or maybe two; or else what's happening to my spine is not TB, but the same thing as in my joints.

I sweat terribly at night. And, you see, I have to lie the whole night through on my right side, and that's very tiring. I can't lie on my back at night. And I can't lie on my left side at all, because my hip is so inflamed. I'm on my back all day. Can't walk a step. In bed all the time. There you have an outline of my general condition. Not too cheerful. I've written to Mikhail Ivanovich, but—no answer, unfortunately. Though, after all, I don't much care. I never did like the medical profession, and now I can't endure it. If I were writing to you as a member of

the profession, and not as a dear, fine girl, the letters you got wouldn't be too pleasant. The pain gets pretty bad at times, Galochka, but I stand it quietly, as I did before. I don't talk of it to anyone, or complain. My feelings are deadened, somehow. I'm grimmer than I was, and, I'm sorry to say, I'm often sad.

Dear Galochka! Cheerfulness, you write, and will. Dear little girl! Cheerfulness, and will. The will is there, but cheerfulness—that's gone. Killed by pure physical suffering. If there were a little less physical pain, I could thaw out a little. But as it is, I have to clench my teeth, sometimes, to keep from howling like a wolf—fiercely, endlessly.

How did you get to know about Marta Purins?*

Novikov must have told you—right? I'll write you about it some other time. In any case, it's a page of my so early blighted life that's not too well known to anyone. If you can find a free minute or two, you'll write to me, at least sometimes.

Tell Mikhail Ivanovich I don't thank him for not writing. Give my regards to Faina Yevseyevna, and to your mother and sister. You're a dear girl, I know. And you and I are more akin than ever after a certain speech of yours that makes me want to shake your hand, and press it hard, my dear, fine Galochka—little old lady!

N. Ostrovsky (Kolya)

TO A. P. DAVIDOVA

Novorossiisk, October 22, 1926

Dear Galochka,

Got your letter yesterday, forwarded from Moscow. And I was so lonely, all those days in Kharkov! If I'd known

* Marta Purins—in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Marta Laurin.—Ed.

your address, I'd surely have come around, and tired you to death, I suppose.

But it didn't work out that way, unfortunately.

That confounded Institute! I turned my face away, every time I passed it with Novikov—I've come to hate it so!

Two whole years of life gone to waste.

I wanted so badly to see you, too. But the Institute was shut up, and you'd written that you'd be spending all of August in Lubotin. The devil's own mess! I thought of looking in to see Faina Yevseyevna, but it didn't work out. So that, all in all, the time I spent in Kharkov was pretty dull and dreary.

In Moscow, though, I really rested, for the first time in all my life. Saw so many friends, and books—I simply gobbled them! And learned so much that was new. The only pity is, it was so short a time—only 21 days.

Why I'm back in Novorossiisk, you'll want to know. My trouble is pretty inclusive, as you know yourself. Well, and the doctors have sent me South, for a year at the least. If I stayed on in Moscow, they say, I'd come down with lung trouble.

It's warm down here—clear, sunny days, and not a hint of autumn. Only, now and again, a cold wind blows from the north-east.

I'll be here till April, and then—Anapa, 40 versts from here, at the sea-side. There I'll stay till next autumn, and after that we'll see how the wind blows. If I can manage to rally some strength, at least a little, I'll get down to some work or other. If I can't, I'll have to make up my mind what to do next. I've only one real trouble, Galochka, and that's my spine. It aches beyond all bearing, and everything else seems trifling by comparison. At night, I simply stifle. I can't lie on my back, on account of my arms and legs, and lying on my side is terribly painful. I can't turn myself from side to side, however hard I try.

I have to be turned. And I can hardly walk at all—ten steps a day, and that with tremendous difficulty. It's spondylitis, no question of that. Only it's not clear yet, what sort.

Tell me, Galochka—is Mikhail Ivanovich at the Institute? I'd like to write him about my condition and ask whether he wouldn't advise a corset, seeing that my back is so bad. And when you see Faina Yevseyevna, ask her too what she thinks about it—whether a corset might do any good.

Things are bad enough, as you see. Try as I may, I can't seem to climb out of my physical ills. The slope is down and down, instead of up.

It takes no little will to keep from ending everything. There are dark days, when everything seems black. But on the whole I keep myself in hand. Life is too attractive, with the struggle that fills it, and our construction work, to give it up. I keep on, in the ever new hope of some day getting back to work. But in the meantime life is hitting hard, and I can't hit back.

But we'll try one more hope—next summer, and the sea. If that helps, all will be well.

I'd like to know about our friends. Where are they all? Is the Institute still closed? And does that mean you're out of work? Regards to your mother and sister, and to Faina Yevseyevna. I'll write more another time. Things are bad physically, just now, and that's why I write so badly and so little. I press your hand, Galochka.

N. Ostrovsky (Kolya)

TO HIS FATHER AND SISTER

Novorossiisk, October 24, 1926

Dear Father and Katya,

Got my papers in good time. Thanks! You sent everything I needed. I'm getting along, more or less. No, don't

send the pillow, or the coat either. Sell the coat, Mother, if you can get anything for it, and buy yourself anything you're in need of. I don't need it at all. I'm a little ill. It's not so much my legs that ache as my spine. I have to stay in bed. Just lie in bed, and read all day. My health is simply rotten. Can't seem to get better, no matter what I do. I'm longing for the summer. Then I can go to Anapa, by the sea. It's some time since I've written to you. Forgive me. But there's nothing to write about except my aches and pains, and I don't like to write about them. I'm sick to death of them. Not a hint of any improvement. Everything the same, day after day. How are you getting on, dear Father? Write to me. My love to you all, and best wishes.

Your *Kolya*

TO HIS BROTHER

Novorossiisk, November 2, 1926

Dear Mitya,

Your letter came today, and I'm answering right off. Dear brother of mine, you needn't worry so about me. There's no need. Things are bad with me, of course—I'm awfully sick, and all that—but you've known about that for a long time now. And I'm not giving in yet. I'll hold out until the summer, anyway. You can depend on that. After all, there's nothing we can do about it. I've got to lie in bed and take it, that's all.

I want you to know, dear brother, that I write you everything, just as it is, without any concealment. If anything serious should happen to me, I won't keep it from you. I'll write and tell you, because—who ought to know how things stand with me, if not you, my own brother? I'm sick, of course, and can't seem to keep out of hospital. But I keep my spirit up, keep a stiff upper lip—you know

yourself. I don't fuss or complain, but keep going as best I can. Of course, it's hard sometimes.... There's certainly no need for you to come. If things were desperate, well, then I wouldn't try to stop you. But there's no sign of that just now. I've held out so long, I suppose I can hold out these few months more till summer comes, and then we'll see. There's nothing so terribly wrong with me. Just foolishness!

It's warm here, and sunny, but I suppose it's real autumn weather in your parts. So you're at work, you say? Where? And doing what—fitter, or conductor? How are our old folk getting on, and all the rest? Write me all the news. I'd do the same, but I have no news. I start writing a letter, and discover I've nothing to say. One day is so much like another.

With my best wishes,

Your brother *Kolya*

TO A. P. DAVIDOVA

Novorossiisk, January 7, 1927

Dear Galochka,

Just got your letter. I can't remember whether I've written to you in the last few days. But I'll write again now, anyway. You see, when things begin to seem blacker than usual, I try to cheer myself up by writing to those few people left me who can bring me in contact, one way or another, with the outside world that I'm cut off from so completely.

I have no friends here. I mean, friends in our sense of the word. True, I have people around me, [who are] very kindly disposed. [But] a typically philistine family. I get along with them well enough, but they can't give me what my own people could. It's depressing to be cut off from my own friends and comrades, Communists. All

these months, never seeing a single comrade, never hearing a word of our real, live life in construction, or of our Party and its work—compelled to move and live (if a person *can* move and live, confined to bed) among people who, for understandable reasons, can offer nothing to satisfy my spiritual needs.

The Party is almost everything in life to me—you know that. And you'll understand how hard it is to me to be in a condition like this, that deprives me of any contact with Party life, such as I had even in Kharkov. There's an emptiness taking shape around me. There's a new sort of feeling, growing gradually on me—something that might really be called vegetation, because the days are so empty, sometimes, that all sorts of anaemic thoughts and decisions push their way to the fore. You can understand this, better than anyone else: that if a man isn't an animal, narrow, selfish, stupid—and there are such, clinging greedily to the very fact of existence; wanting nothing but to keep alive, to continue and prolong their existence; blind to all the realities of their situation—if a man isn't that, things are sometimes very, very dark for him.

A few years ago it would have been much easier for me to stand this situation. Then, I'd have taken it as the majority of people would. But things are different now. And if I have my bad moments, there's nothing shameful about that. It's three years already, after all. Three years of struggle for life—and, time after time, I've been thrashed and pushed another step backwards. If it weren't for the law of struggle to the last, that's planted at the very bottom of my nature, I should have shot myself long since. Because a man can't possibly keep on this way, unless he takes it as a period of the most desperate struggle.

Remember what it was that made us friends, you and I. Those first days of my time at the Institute. I never forget them. I was like a wolf cub, caught and caged, in those days. Now, I'm a worn wolf, living my last.

It's only people like us, people so madly in love as me with life, and our struggle, and the work that's being done to build a new world, so much better than the old—it's only we, who've come to see life truly, as it really is—only we, that can't go out of life so long as there's even one chance left us. The summer months will be the test.

Personally, I don't much hope for any improvement. But we shall see. I haven't written you everything. I will, in another letter. I'm tired now.... You're so tender in your letters, Galochka. Though we come from two different worlds, still, there's something that makes us kindred. My little old lady, so tiny and delicate, I press your tiny paw.

You'll write to me, of course. Because the days are darker for me now than usual.

N. Ostrovsky

TO P. N. NOVIKOV*

[*Novorossiisk*] October 22, 1927

Dear Petya,

Our correspondence is rather uneven, but—what can a person do? I shan't try to apologize. You'll curse a bit, and then cool off—don't I know?—and make up your mind there's no improving those "unorganized elements"! I've no particular news. In bed all the time. Thinking of writing—some sort of "historico-lyrico-heroical tale." Really, though, joking aside, I'm thinking seriously of writing. Only I don't know what will come of it. I read day and night—literally. I get all the books I want—I've joined a huge library—and I'm reading greedily. Science, and, in between—to clear my brain—fiction as well. All the new books. It's fine!...

* Pyotr Nikolayevich Novikov—a friend of Ostrovsky's.—Ed.

What are you doing with yourself, old friend? How do you fill your time? The real fact is, you're still wandering about on the edge of things, not in them. Just to think of it, Petya, good old Petro—why, if I had your legs, I'd have raced our whole U.S.S.R. across and back ten times, by this! . . .

And so, I press your paw, dear friend. Give my regards to Frol and Anna.

Your *Kolya Ostrovsky*

TO HIS FAMILY

[*Matsesta*] June 20, 1928

Dear friends,

Here's the news—telegraphic style:

1. Had my first bath (five minutes). What you call luxury! No plain spring water, this! A huge bath room for serious cases. They bring you straight in, on stretchers or invalid chairs. Roomy and convenient.

The sanatorium stands on the mountainside. Woods all around, and palm trees, and flowers. A beautiful sight, God's my witness! The baths are 200 paces lower down. They take us there in a sort of wagonette. And what experts those attendants are! Never a bump or a jerk! I've made several friends already among the attendants. The nurses are young, and they'll read me the *Pravda* and etc. Don't misunderstand. The "etc." is perfectly innocent.

Next: the doctors have given me a looking-over. They say Matsesta should help. Everything's planned out already. After the first five days, massage, right in the bath. And they'll take me out of doors in the day-time, out under the palms, in a special chair. The days I missed will be added on. And there will be an official decision that I need a month and a half or two, that one month's not enough. A nurse sits with me at meals, to make me eat. They saw from the first that I'm no great eater—though,

after the trip, I eat three times as much here as I ever did at home. Five meals a day, and they certainly stuff us—woe to me!

My roommate is a wonderful comrade—an Old Bolshevik, and a member of the presidium of the Moscow Control Commission. We've plenty to talk about.

Not a single fly in the ointment! I sleep well, too. It's quiet as the grave all night. And the windows wide open all day round. I'll certainly have a good rest here. Katya, my dearest, I'm so sorry you're not here with me. It's more beautiful than Sukhumi, even. My heart aches when I think of what you're suffering, my own dear, fine little sister.

With much love,

Kolya

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA*

[Matsesta] August 1 [1928]

Dear Shura,

It's only a day since you left. Only one day.

I move to town the day after tomorrow. But these days are empty to me, somehow, and blank.

It's a sad thing to get used to people, and—worse still! —to form friendships, comradeships, when you're a tramp like me, because it's always so grievous when life parts you with your friends.

I'll write you often, write you everything....

Pankov is here beside me, talking, but all I can think of is—where you are now, and what you're thinking of.

Dear comrade of mine, Shura! I've known you so little, yet you've grown so close!

I'll soon write you a long letter, about everything.

N. Ostrovsky

* Alexandra Alexeyevna Zhigareva—a friend of Ostrovsky's. Figures, without change of name, in *How the Steel Was Tempered*.—Ed.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, Aug[ust] 25, 1928

Dear Shura,

I'm alone today. Raya's away at a district conference.* About Raya's public work: her activity in the trade union is growing. It absorbs her more and more, this work, so that, clearly, I shall be left more and more alone. But there can't be any question of changing that, particularly with Raya thinking of applying for candid[ate] membership in the C.P.S.U.(B). This is her last year in the League (she's 23). I'm giving her the necessary political training....

I've brought several working people into the Party since the time I reached political consciousness myself. I've lost contact with them now, unfortunately, but I do know that they've become good Party people, all of them. It's always been a joy to me when my work has brought into our ranks one more comrade who had formerly kept (organizationally) outside the Comm[unist] movement.

Yet there are some comrades who can't recall a single person they've taught, influenced, drawn into the Party! They've mechanically recommended people for membership—but that's not the same thing.

Now that I'm ill, the greater part of my enthusiasm, in those periods when the fearful pains give me any breathing space, has been, and still is, devoted to those few workers I have had around me (in the present case, Raya), so as to direct [their] working-class understanding and confirm it in the will to struggle for the new life. And I see the result of my work, in the fact that we will have that many more devoted Party comrades in our ranks when [f]uture battles break. Grains of sand, of course—terribly little. But that's the greatest that I can do just now....

* Raya—Ostrovsky's wife, Raisa Pavlovna Ostrovskaya.—Ed.

Comrade Shura, when . . . you have news of any kind, write it to me. Tell me about these bits of real, live work.

My confounded eyes keep on in the same old way—sabotaging. I write this, but, for the life of me, I can't see what I'm writing. I'm afraid I write one word over another, and you'll be angry with me because you can't make out a thing. . . .*

Thanks for the *Pravda*. You know how things go here. You get one issue, and can't get the next. Scandalous!

Forgive me, dear friend, for boring you so long.

I press your hand.

Regards to your little boy.

Regards from Raya.

Kolya Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, October 29, 1928

Dear Comrade of mine,

Why have your letters grown so few and far between? Is it that your work takes all your time? That happens, I know. And the intervals seem so long to me, I suppose, because no one writes to me now. Or because it's only with you I'm in such close contact, bombarding you with tales about every day of my life, almost, and writing to no one else on account of my eyes. Perhaps these endless letters tire you, and rob you of time that might be better used. But you must write and tell me, if they do. All this Oriental ceremonial—it's not your way, nor is it mine. If you're tired of my letters, say so, and I'll try to hold off a bit. I won't stop writing altogether—that I refuse to

* Ostrovsky's eyesight was already bad at this time. In a number of his letters there are words and whole sentences which are almost indecipherable, lines written one over another, repetitions of words, and other slips.—*Ed.*

promise. But—not so thick and fast. There, that's that. And now I can begin. We've moved—three days ago—and now we're living like regular bourgeois. A big room, three windows, and flooded with sunlight. Electric light, and even running water (only we have to pump it). Now I can breathe deep, and have my fill of the sun. I hadn't seen it for 26 days. That basement we were living in oppressed me terribly, both phys[ically] and morally. I'll be staying here, now, through the winter.

... We're near the Krasnaya Moskva sanatorium. A little too far from things for Raya, it's true, with all the meetings she attends, but that can't be helped. And it's so beautiful out here, Shurochka! We'll rest here wonderfully next summer, dear friend. Don't you forget, now, Shura: if you don't come, and bring your little boy along, I'll quarrel with you for good and all. A ten-minute walk to the sea isn't too much even for Chinese feet—tiny ones, I mean, like yours. It's less than you had to walk to the baths at Matsesta. There's a big park here, too. And you know, Shurochka, even if you and I go to Matsesta for the baths, your little boy can bathe and sun-bathe on the beach here, in easy reach of our house. And then, after the sanatorium, you can rest here too. No joke about it—you just read this part of my letter to the youngster, and I hope he'll give you no peace till you board the train marked "Leningrad—Sochi." Yes, Lyonya must give you no peace, or else you might "forget," or something else in the same order.

It would have been ridiculous to ask you here while I was living in that basement. But now I'm a capitalist! We have a huge room (according to my limited concepts).

Can you read my letters?

[The end of this letter is missing.]

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] November 16, 1928

Dear Shura,

Received all your letters. I'd been worrying at not hearing from you, and beginning to think perhaps you were tired of our correspondence. Now I see how wrong I was....

How I wish I could be with you now, and talk things over among Bolshevik comrades. That would be such a rest for me!....

My helplessness is so sore at times, both morally and physically—more than I can describe. Try to imagine it, Shura: the struggle going on around you, and you tied fast, unable to do anything but watch....

Write to me, dear Shura—write, my dear good friend! I need your letters.

Give my love to Lyonya.

Kolya

I'd like to write you a few words about my comrade, Raya, and her development.

I forget all my troubles, Shura, as I watch this young working woman grow and develop. She's my political pupil, and it makes me very happy to see her growing, becoming a new person. Now she's altogether absorbed in her work.... Not a day or an evening without some meeting, or conference, or the like. She comes running in all aglow, full of her new tasks and assignments, and we work together over them. These days, she's tremendously busy, rushing about endlessly, helping in the preparations for elections to the town Soviet.

It will be a good thing to have the Soviet renewed with fresh forces, working people.

I have no intention of checking this development of Raya's, in the slightest degree. I am doing everything in my power to help on this advancing proletarian....

Kolya

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] November 26, 1928

Shura, dearest,

I oughtn't to write this letter to you just now, because I'm upset, and writing on the spur of the moment....

When I lose the real foundation of this life of mine—the hope of a return to the struggle—that will be the end.

I sometimes think regretfully of all the energy, the inexhaust[ible] Bolshevik persistence that it takes me to keep from running myself into some blind alley. Spent on real work, all that energy could be very useful.

I see people around me—strong as oxen, but with the cold blood of fish; sleepy, indifferent, languid, bored. Their talk reeks of mould. I hate them. I can't understand how people, strong and healthy, can be bored in tense times like ours. I've never lived that sort of life, and I never will....

I wish I could see you, and have a talk. You're one of those I trust.... An elder comrade in the Party....

I've mapped out my road in life, deep within me. I know where we're heading for, and how. No, I'm not standing at any cross-roads....

Nothing about my radio just yet. When it's put together finally, I'll write you whether I can get Leningrad.*

My love to your youngster.

Your Kolya

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] January 30, 1929

Dear Shurochka,

I'm beginning to worry. Thirty-odd days, and not a word from you. What's wrong? Or does your work swallow every minute of your time?

* More by sense of touch than by sight (he was now almost entirely blind), Ostrovsky was building himself a radio set.—Ed.

I've already sent you our new address, but here it is again: Sochi, Ulitsa Voikova, 39. Anything addressed to the old place is forwarded, though.

It's spring weather here. Now and again, a little frost at night....

Eight days from now, they're to operate on my eyes. Personally, I have *little faith* that my sight will come back. *But I must do everything possible*, so there can be no regrets over shirk[ing] battle on this front.

You see, I understand my condition perfectly well, and everything that concerns it. No one realizes these things so clearly as I do. No needless excitement or tragedy about it, but I perfectly realize the situation, the whole situation.

I've had two camphor injections. For all my heart is so strong, we've had to [help] it out with camphor. Much better now, though the pulse isn't too good—it's still uneven. Personally, I'm sure I'll hold out till the summer, yes, and through the summer. And then we'll see.

You and I will get together yet, dear comrade of mine, Shurochka, and talk over many things that we may want to tell each other.

I've a room to myself, nice and sunny.... There's another room for Raya and Mother.... We're well supplied with firewood, and the rooms are warm.

I hardly see Raya at all. She leaves at 6:30 in the morning (I'm still asleep), and gets home at 11 or 12 at night (I'm asleep by then). She enters the C.P.S.U.(B.) in March—on Women's Day.

The town Party [committee] has taken a very comradely attitude. They've supplied us with firewood, and sent me a doctor....

The doctors don't allow me to talk—just now particularly. And I lie alone, day after day, with my wild, glorious dreams of a great world-wide rising.

I press your hand, oh, so hard, my dearest Shurochka.

Nikolai

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] February 20, 1929

Dear Shurochka,

A letter from you at last! Now it's clear enough why nothing came from you so long—your work in the countryside, and your illness.

About the doctors—yes, I'll do as you advise.

I'm already having a test made, and the doctors will be here again today or tomorrow. The fact is, I've discovered the reason of all my strange stomach troubles. It's those drops they give me for my eyes—atropine, they're called. When I don't use the drops, there's no bitter taste, and my appetite is good. And none of the doctors could guess what was wrong! Now, about my eyes. *I'm going blind, Shura. I can hardly see at all.* Soon the loss of sight will be 100 per cent, and that will be catastrophe.

If your doctor friend could have a talk with some real specialist, on the basis of what my eye doctor here could write him, that would be a good thing, because the doctor here is very young. They propose some sort of intravenous mercury injections, to improve my general condition. I'm not sure I'll agree, because the good they may do is doubtful.

Dear Shurochka, I've already written you how depressed I've been feeling. Yes, that still keeps on, and it's helped along by the steady advance of blindness.

I still have the strength to hold on, somehow. But that's the very most that I can muster.

Just to think of it, dear friend of mine—when you get here, with your little boy, I won't see your face. And no getting around it.

I may not be able to write to you, now, for some time. But you [will] understand that.

Greetings. I press your hands.

Kolya

Regards from Mother and Raya. On March 8, Raya enters the ranks of the C.P.S.U.(B.).

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] April 21, 1929

... If 1/100 of the energy spent on these endless sicknesses upon sicknesses that have become my profession lately, if it could be spent on productive labour, why even a Vyborg worker* would be hard put to it to keep up with me. But as things are, such dreams are soap bubbles....

Nothing but some good, strong swearing ... could express my hatred for this everlasting mess, that I can't seem to [find] any way out of. The fact remains, a cursed fact, but a stubborn one—that 1929, its beginning at any rate, is treating me worse than 1928. And this worsening, if it intensif[ies] a little more, may wipe out life itself.

I've got together a [group] of young people—not many as yet, it's true, and not too regular. And I exploit them ruthlessly—make them read aloud to me from the newspapers, Party magazines, and the like. My greeting to every newcomer is, "Read to me!" And they read, read till their tongues begin to trip. Hastily, insatiably, I drink in all that I've been missing. "Read!" is my slogan for all—and to some, I must say, it's a weary task. But the result is there: I'm getting in touch with current life again.

Raya has orders to bring me youngsters from the League. I prepare them a bit, and then begin to exploit them—simply shamelessly. It's good for them as well as me, though they tire of it quickly enough. Reading is a weak point with them. They haven't yet learned to need it.

The *Bolsheviks* are very welcome.** Keep it up, Shurochka! Good for you!

* The Vyborg district, in Leningrad, was known for its revolutionary traditions.—*Ed.*

** In April 1929 A. A. Zhigareva sent Ostrovsky a back file of the magazine *Bolshevik*.—*Ed.*

A few words for Lyonya:

Dear Lyonya,

Mother writes me that you keep reminding her about the Black Sea. That Baltic of yours may be fine, but the Black is ever so much better! It's so warm down here, and the palm trees—like the tropics, almost. And the great snow-capped mountains—and the beauty of it all! No wonder you dream of it at night. Only that Mother Shura of yours seems to feel quite differently about it. And so, make it your job: when Mother is well, and gets her vacation, start a desperate campaign for a trip to the South. Try agitation, and try propaganda.... Try your hardest for the through train from Leningrad to Sochi.... Agreed, little brother?

Till we meet in August—right?

I press your hand, and Mother's.

N. Ostrovsky

TO HIS BROTHER, SISTER, AND FATHER

Sochi, 1929

Dear Mitya, Katya, and my dear old Father,

This is to let you know that Mother has become a delegate to the department for work among women at the town Party Committee. She's been issued credentials to that effect, and now she'll be attending meetings of the department and of the different Party units, taking her part in the life of the working class. Who knows—perhaps, if she wants to, and if she can rally the energy for a little political study, she, too, may yet become a member of our Party—the third in our family.

Kolya

TO R. B. LYAKHOVICH*

*Moscow,
University Clinic,
January 9, 1930*

Dear Rosochka,

At last I've got Comrade Liza into my clutches, and mobilized her to write for me—my first letter in three months, sad as that may be. First, a question: did you get the letter I sent to your Sukhumi address? And now, what's been happening to me. Though, first, I want to remind you again of that law of D. Khoruzhenko's: that friendship isn't measured by the number of letters written. Well, then, in brief, the situation is this. The operation on my eyes can't be done as yet—not until the inflammation goes down. The winter's caught me in Moscow, like a mouse in a trap. I caught cold terribly, here in the clinic, and was feverish for a whole month. The confounded 'flu, with all its unpleasantness and complications. My temperature still goes up and down between 37° and 37.5° [98.5° and 99.5° F.]—some stubborn remnant, holding on inside of me and jerking the thermometer. As a result, I'm pretty weak (haven't even got the energy to quarrel with Comrade Liza, who's writing this for me). My aim now is to get away from all medical institutions—to get away, whatever happens, and I don't care where to. I won't go into the details of my hospital existence. I'm too sick and tired of it all. Am taking a number of steps to get me out of it. They're thinking of transferring me to the Kremlin hospital, but I'm trying my best to get away from all and any med[ical] institutions, if only I can manage it.

Jan. 10. My letter-writing yesterday was unexpectedly interrupted. Today, it's continued for me by a comrade of the other sex—Misha, a Moscow friend of mine. As to

* Rosalia Borisovna Lyakhovich—a friend of Ostrovsky's.—Ed.

your letters, Rosa, we received them all. And with each new letter my conscience hurt the more for my long silence. Yes, Rosa—I'll learn from Raya tomorrow what's come of my attempt at getting a room in Moscow.... I'm expecting your brother. Raya's time is taken up a hundred and fifty per cent. We hardly see each other—once in four or five days. She came through the Party purge the other day. A good, comradely atmosphere, just as we'd expected. So all our old friends have got married, you say? Well, then, it's your turn now—time you began to take life seriously! Yes, I do hear from Shura Zhigareva. And now, my little old lady—you must write me all that's doing in Kharkov, and all about our friends, and not take offence when I don't write. I remember you all, every single one. I'm not one to forget people that quickly. It's not my fault, but my misfortune, that I can't write long letters to all of you. And as to Raya, she writes to no one at all. Cries of indignation from every side. Busy as she can be, my poor Raikom.* The next few days will bring many new developments and changes, in my medical treatment and in other things. Hope to die if I don't write you all the news right off. And so—write to me, long letters, and often. That's the main line. And all the rest is foolishness.

I press your hands.

Nikolai

Raya has your address, but I want to mail this right off, so I'm addressing it to Petya. He'll bring it to you.

Raya sends her love.

Nikolai

* *Raikom*—abbreviation of *Rayonni Komitet* (District Party Committee); Ostrovsky's nickname for his wife.—*Ed.*

TO HIS FAMILY

Moscow, January 12, 1930

Dear Communards,

I don't write you often. It's hard work for me.

Warmest greetings to you all. There's one thing I badly want to do. I want to see Mother a Communist. She wants it too. If I can hold out this year, I'll help her prepare, our own working Mother. I've been wanting this for a long time, but I didn't know at first how she felt about it. And now I've set myself this aim: to keep alive till Mother enters the Party. Then we'll all be Bolsheviks—our whole family. I'm tired, dear people. Don't be angry at my not writing. It's not my fault.

I press your hands, warmly, heartily.

With Communist greetings,

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Moscow] February 22, 1930

Dear Shurochka,

I suppose you're wondering that your fosterlings don't write. If things were a little brighter, Shurochka, if there were the least change for the good in this life of mine, I'd write you about it immediately. But as things are, I know too well what anxiety and worry I bring into your life, with all my troubles. I know you well enough to guess that you'll take everything to heart, and want to try to help. But I can't be so selfish. Friends like me will always bring worries, because life is stern. It has no patience with people who can't stand on their feet.

I feel and realize, more than others, the iron tread of the passing days, and nothing, for me, remains undecided. But, Shurochka, however hard each day may be, I'm

going to stay alive all these coming months—it will be a year at the most—until the question of my eyes is settled.

You see, dear friend of mine, there are certain comrade[s] who have let me down in a number of things, and as a result I've been getting some small jerks and blows. That's only normal.

It's true, after all, that things may look grey today, but tomorrow they may be brighter.

And now, I have some news to write about my Party daughter, about Raya. She's being transferred from candidate membership to full membership in the C.P.S.U.(B.).

Raya, my own fine girl—she will be my last contribution to the Party, a living contribution—a fighter in battles to come, and an honest, devoted worker.

I'm tired, Shurochka. I press your hand.

Give my regards to Lyonya, and to everyone.

Kolya

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Moscow, April 3, 1930

Dear Shura,

I was operated March 22. They removed a parathyroid gland. I came through the operation pretty badly, but there's a turn for the better now. I've been given a room in Moscow. The professor's theory is that after this operation my health should return. Will write you a huge letter just as soon as I'm a little stronger. There's been no news from you, Shura, for quite some time. Write me how things are with you, if it's only a few lines. Raya is with me all the time.

I press your hand.

Nikolai

P.S. I'm thinking of shifting to Sochi, about April 15, to rest after these months of nightmare.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Moscow] April 22, 1930

Dear Shura,

May Day greetings to you, a little in advance! I've moved from the clinic to the room they've given me. Address: Moscow 34, Myortvi Pereulok, 12, ap[artment] 2.

I'd like to get away to Sochi about May 2, but I'm not sure it will work out, purely technically . . . [This line was evidently continued past the edge of the paper.—Ed.] removed a parathyroid gland, by the method recommended by Prof. Oppel, of Leningrad. An hour and a half. Local anaesthesia. I was pretty bad for nine days after—feverish (40° [104° F.]) after the operation.

Now I'm very weak. But the results seem good. My joints are beginning to move a bit.

Raya stayed all those nights beside me. You can imagine how tired she is. Everyone notices how thin she's got.

The doctors all insist that I must have Matsesta right off, after my operation, because the salts accumulated at my joints will begin to resolve. There's an abnormal amount of calcium in my blood. It's . . . [Line continued beyond the edge of the paper.—Ed.]

The inflammation in my eyes has begun to go down since the operation. They haven't hurt once, in almost a month. It would be a good thing if the inflammation disappeared entirely. Then Averbakh would agree to operate.

Why don't you write, Shurochka? Has anything happened?

I'll be waiting for news from you, if it's only the briefest little note.

Tell me, Shura—aren't we going to meet, this year?

Raya's working at her factory, as before. Now she has one more responsibility—they've put her in charge of the circulating library. I take up so much of her time, though, that she simply can't manage all she has to do.

She's soon to be made a full member of the C.P.S.U.(B.).

There's much I'd like to write you, but I'm too weak. And blind, Shurochka. Give my regards to your friends.

We press your hands.

Nikolai and Raya

TO R. B. LYAKHOVICH

Moscow, April 30, 1930

Dear Comrade Rosochka,

I haven't the strength for letter-writing, but I'll make a try. I'd quite enough troubles to my share already, and now here's a new grief: you people won't be coming. I was looking forward so to seeing you. It needs no mountains of letters, after all, to prove the firm friendship binding us all. Stop. I must economize energy. And so, receiving one more blow, I stretch out my hand instinctively to ward off the next. Because, ever since I left Sochi, I've been a sort of punching bag for boxing practice. Punching bag—I put it that way because I keep getting hit, and can't hit back. I'd rather not write now of all that's past, my operation and the sum total of physical fevers I've been through. That's over now. I've grown grimmer, and older, and—strange as it may seem—my courage has only strengthened. I suppose that's because I'm getting nearer to the final stage in the struggle.

The nerve professors declare categorically that I'm in an extreme state of psychasthenia. That's true. The result of eight terrible months. One thing is clear, Rosochka—the need to get away from here immediately, the need for quiet and for my own people around me. And what does that mean—*my own people*? It means Mother, Raya, Rosa, Petya, Mussy, Bersenyev, Shura, Mitya Ostrovsky and Mitya Khoruzhenko: people whose genuine friendship I can always be sure of. Stop. A fearful, difficult stage is

over. I've come out of it with my dearest possessions intact. My mind is clear, and my dynamo unharmed—I mean, that steeled and tempered Bolshevik heart of mine—though I've used up something like 99 per cent of my physical powers.

It's taken me all day to get this written. Another reason why I must leave for Sochi quickly is that, here, I'm left alone for 16 hours of the day. And in the state I'm in now, [that] will end in catastrophe. Raya is losing her last ounce of strength in this vicious circle. She gets four hours' sleep a day, at best. Stop.

I'm all for your idea of a shift to Moscow (because, you see, I'll be living here too—if I keep alive, of course). You can always find work here. People like you are badly needed. As to the Party—you and I will talk that over yet. But so far as general advice is concerned, I'm all in favour of such an aim.... There can be no really 100 per cent builder of the new life without a membership book in Lenin's iron Bolshevik Party. Life without that is dull, insipid. How can a person live outside the Party ranks in such great, unexampled times as ours?... Where is the joy of life, outside the Party? Family, love—none of that can give you a real sense of fulness of life. Family—that means, a few people. Love—that means, one person. Whereas the Party means 1,600,000. To live exclusively for your family—that's brute egoism. To live for the love of some one person—that's base. To live for yourself alone, is shameful. Go to it, Rosa. There may be blows, and painful blows at times—but keep your helm steady to the C.P.S.U.(B.). Your life will be filled, then. You'll have an aim, something to live for. But—it's hard, remember that. You'll have to work very hard. Stop.

Take care of your health. If you break your health, you break everything, break your whole life. See how it is with me. I have everything you're longing for, but I've no strength, and—I have nothing. Next. We must get to-

gether. Spend your vacation with us, your second family. If there's any danger of breakdown, drop everything immediately and build up your health—the fighter's one irreplaceable treasure. May Day greetings. Regards to all.

Nikolai Ostrovsky

TO P. N. NOVIKOV

[Sochi] June 23, 1930

Dear Sonny—Pyotr Nikolayevich,

See you behave yourself in Leningrad, like a good little boy. Keep your nose in your books, and don't spend all your time at the operetta. Auntie Zhigareva's address is as follows: Vasilyevsky Ostrov, 13th Line, No. 32, apt. 40. Dear Petya!... I thought you'd grown up by now, but it turns out you're still in need of a father's watchful eye. I simply can't forgive you for getting married without my permission. Yes, the way children behave, these days—it's simply dreadful! Nothing but trouble for their poor parents! Well, then—write me everything new and interesting you see. I'd like very much to see you in September. Let me know whether Tamara is still in Kharkov. I want to write to her again. No particular news....

I press your hands.

Your own Dad, Nikolai

TO P. N. NOVIKOV

[Sochi] September 11, 1930

I don't want to write you about all those past eight months of chaos. The devil with it all! An endless nightmare of pain and blood, that all but cost me my life. The one thing that consoles me is that so far, in spite of everything, I've managed to fool death—or, perhaps

simply to frighten it away. I've one more huge scar—not a battle scar, this time. A hospital one. And that's the net result of the whole business....

I've thought up a plan to fill my life with real content—the only thing that can justify the very fact of life. It's a difficult thing, this plan of mine, and very far from simple. If I can manage to get it going, I'll write you more about it. In any case, there's nothing unplanned about my course in life. I keep a straight course, with no loops or zigzags about it. I know just where I stand, and so far there's no need to be jumpy. I organically detest and despise the sort of people that begin to whine and get hysterical when life hits mercilessly out at them.

I may be tied to my bed today, but that doesn't mean you can call me a sick man. That's all wrong, all silly nonsense! I'm perfectly healthy. What if my legs can't move, and I can't see a thing? That's a pure misunderstanding—an idiotic, devilish joke. Give me one leg and one eye today, and I'll be as active a fighter as any one of you who do battle in every field of our construction work.

Nikolai

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Moscow [January-June, 1931]

Dear Shurochka,

It's half a year since we last heard from you. Not a word all this time, and none of us knows a thing. But I'm still hoping for a letter from you. With us, things are much the same as usual. I'm keeping up my work on the book I've started, that I wrote you about in my last letter.* I'd like to have you read through a few bits of it, if not the whole. I could send them to you. They'll be

* The novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*.—Ed.

typewritten, and easy to read. I'd like to know what you think of them. Only—you don't answer my letters, Shurochka! Tell me—why are you angry with me? Why don't you write?

I press your hands.

N. Ostrovsky

TO P. N. NOVIKOV

Moscow, May 26, 1931

... And so, Petya, I'm full of the urge to write my *How the Steel Was Tempered*, to write the whole of it. But it's a giant's task—so many difficulties in the way! I've no one to dictate to. It's simply torment. But I'm stubborn as an ox. I've begun to judge people by the one criterion: whether or not they can be asked to write to my dictation. I even write myself!!! By night, blind as I am—when everyone's asleep, and there's no chatter to hinder my work. Cursed Nature has taken my eyes away, just when I need them so badly....

Perhaps I'll be able to send you and my Kharkov friends parts of what I've already written. Eh, but wouldn't it be fine if we were all together! Life would be brighter with my friends around me. Tell me, Petya: if I should need to have ten pages or so of the manuscript typed out, could you do that for me, or would it be too much bother? The editorial board demands two or three bits to judge by, and—confound them!—they won't take it in note-book form. It's got to be typewritten, on one side of the paper only. I suppose you'll say I'm trying to exploit you too. But you can just tell me to go to hell, Petya, and that won't cool our friendship in the least.

I press your paw, and Tamara's little hand.

Kolya Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Moscow, June 28 [19]31

Dear Shurochka,

We were very happy to get your letter, after so long. The main thing is, that you're alive and more or less well. The rest doesn't matter. I hope we won't have such long silences any more.

You ask about our friends.... Not a sign from Pankov. And I really need him badly, just now. He promised once to give me any help he could, as an editor, in the work I've started.... Rosochka: she's working. Not married. As to the rest, they're keeping on as usual.

Write me, Shura, definitely, whether you have the time and the desire to go through a few bits of my work. If you have, I'll put them in order and send them to you. If you know any editors, or people of that sort, among your Party friends, perhaps you could give them my work to read, and see [what] they have to say about it.

Will write you more about this later.

I have very few friends in Moscow. Two, to be precise. One is an Old Bolshevik, the other a youngster.

I press your hand.

N. Ostrovsky

TO P. N. NOVIKOV

Moscow, July 4, 1931

... Altogether, I'm burning up. I can feel my strength ebbing away. Only my will remains, firm and clear-cut as always. If it weren't for that, I'd go insane, or worse. Not a line written in the last 20 days. Complete standstill. And I keep thinking—what can be the quality of work done in such inhuman conditions? Why don't you people write a word about quality? I'm anxious to know what you think. *How the Steel Was Tempered* is all fact. Noth-

ing but fact. I'm trying to show the working-class youth, to show it in struggle and in construction work. Let me have your criticism of what I've written, of its quality. Why don't you write me a word about it? Petya, pass this letter on to Rosa and Tamara.

Neither you, Petya, nor Tamara has read the whole of the book. That's a pity. I've pressed and pressed my friends to open the fire of criticism, so I can tell where my weak points are. And when you wrote me that the sentences are long, I checked the punctuation, and my hair stood up on end. In the chapters you haven't seen, I had to add 840 commas and periods—in the typed copy, too. And it was a college student that typed it!

My book is under fire now at the Writers' Club, and it's been handed over to the editorial board of the Molodaya Gvardia publishing house. I'm expecting the verdict any minute now. I've thrown myself against the ring of iron that life has prisoned me in. I'm trying to get away from the hindmost lines, get back again to the front ranks of struggle and labour, with the class that I belong to. If there are people who think a Bolshevik can't be useful to his Party even in such a hopeless state as mine may seem to be—those people are wrong. If I'm annihilated at the publishing house, I'll set to work again. And that will be the final conflict. I must get back into life. That is my passionate longing. And the darker the shadows of my own personal existence, the more fiery my aspirations.

I press your hands, all of you. Will send news soon—I hope, of victory.

Nikolai

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Moscow] December 9 [1931]

Shura, dear,

Just got your letter. Dear friend! If writing weren't so difficult a task for me, how many letters I would write

you, my own friend! I've been waiting with such anxiety for your letter, for your impressions of my book.

Shurochka! It's more than I can do, in a letter, to describe the conditions in which the book was written. . . . The book would have been better, Shurochka, beyond comparison, it would certainly have been better, if it hadn't been for those conditions, difficult beyond all expression. There was no one to take my dictation. No peace or quiet. Nothing. I can't simply condemn myself, without one more attempt to be something better than ballast for our Party. I'm studying literature, in good earnest. After all, I'm only barely literate. And I'm sure I'll be able to write better than I have so far. Persistent study, and earnest labour, will lead to quality. But all that on condition that I'm not smashed too completely in the publishing houses—not thrown out at the door on my very first attempt. And yet, that's only to be expected. I know how weak my work must be. Only you realize my tragedy. The publishers have one criterion—quality. It's hard to write, [for people] like me.

. . . You don't speak badly of the manuscript. That makes me happy. If I've been able to write well enough, in such desperately bad conditions, so that you don't find it colourless and useless—I'm very glad. I delegate every right to you, so far as the manuscript is concerned. I'm confident you'll do everything in your power to get the publishers to consider the book and pass decision on it. You, and none other. After all, the one thing I'm asking is, not to have the book drift about for years in the editorial backwaters. New masses are coming into literature, and the editorial boards are overworked—flooded with thousands of manuscripts, only a few of which will ever come out.

I'm expecting a long letter from you. Don't reproach me for writing so seldom. It's not easy to write by others' hands. And when you write, write about Korchagin too,

Have I managed to render it truthfully to any degree—the life of this young worker and Young Communist?

Write how life is treating you. Yes, it's a long letter we'll be waiting for. And how I wish I could see you, Shurochka! The weather here is frosty, 20°-24° below [4°-11° below, F.]. Our whole family has been ill by turns—even Raya. Our friends seldom write. I press your hands. Don't forget us. And write me frankly everything bad that's said about my book.

Nikolai

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Moscow] December 28 [1931]

Dear Shurochka,

I'm writing this myself. Can you make out my scribbling? My brother's come from Shepetovka, to spend six days with us. Five chapters of my rough draft were read at a Party meeting there. People spoke well of it, and welcomed it as a study of the history of the rev[olutionary] movement in the town. There's a country-wide review of Young Communist League literature on, and the Mlodaya Gvardia publishing house has asked to see my manuscript. But I've decided to wait for your answer from Leningrad. After all, if it's turned down in L[eningrad], it will be turned down here as well.

Doing no writing these days. I'm terribly worn out, after all I've been through in the past months.... Will be waiting for news from you. Don't forget your younger brother.

Kolya

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Moscow [January 31, 1932]

Dearest Shurochka,

Received your letter yesterday, the 30th. You don't know, dear Shura, how my heart began to beat when it was read to me. I keep asking myself—can it really be that happiness is holding out its hand to me, and [I'm] coming back again from the depths of the archives into the ranks of the army in the field? Can it really be that this youngster—that I will manage to repay my Party some fraction, at least, of the debt I owe it? That I can stop spending my days in useless idleness? And I keep checking myself. "Be still, youngster," I tell myself. "Don't get excited. Life is liable to hit out again, to punish you for dreaming."

And so, to make the blow easier to bear, I won't let myself believe that I've succeeded. Fac[ts] are the only things life will let me put my faith in.

Raya's away at the factory from morning to night, and I hunger, sometimes, to have people around me—people full of vigour and optimism. And so I've decided . . . to fill our room with the fervent spirit of youth.

I've undertaken to organize a literary group among the youth in Shepetovka. The newspaper *Put Oktyabrya* (*Road of October*) has accepted my offer. Every ten days, it runs a "literary page." And so, half-baked writer that I am myself, I've become the leader of a literary group; and I've already received my first batch of verse, in Ukrainian, for criticism. There, Shurochka—that's all the news I have to tell you.

How I wish I could see you, Shurochka! So much bitterness, so many contradictions, and at the same time—new hopes for a useful, creative life ahead.

Forgotten by many, I'm beginning to devel[op] new contact with the youth. My work is welcomed, and it

moves and warms my heart [when] young people in the town I write of ad[opt] resolutions of approval. A group of students write me about a discussion of my book at the normal school.

If you write me "Yes," on the 3rd or 4th, I'll say—Nikolai has been born again.

I'll be waiting for your letter.

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Moscow, February 22, 1932

Dear friend Shurochka,

I must tell you my good news on the literary front. I had visitors yesterday—Fedenev, and with him Com. Kolosov, asst. editor of the *Molodaya Gvardia* magazine. My manuscript has been discuss[ed] here in Moscow. Com. Kolosov has also read it.... And so, he came in yesterday and said:

"We have no other material such as yours. The book is well written, and you have every prospect for creative work. The book moved me deeply. We've decided to publish it.... I'll bring you into contact with other writers, and we'll make you a member [of] the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers even before the book comes out."

He promised to come again in nine or ten days for my answer. And so, Shurochka, if I'm wiped out in Leningrad, I've a reserve to fall back on—a direct offer to put out my book. So far, of course, there's no document, no agreement in black on white. Only a conversation. But—it's victory, almost. Almost.... Didn't Lenin warn us to put no faith in words?

Well, and how are our affairs with the Leningrad publishers, Shurochka? Success, or failure? I'm waiting impatiently for news from you. Not a moment's peace do I

give you! When will that incorrigible fellow stop pestering you?—I suppose you want to know. But that I can't say.

My work is reviving old connections. Letters come in from people who had long since forgotten me. Hail, labour and struggle! Here's hoping Kolya will really break out of his ring of iron and take his place in the ranks of the advancing proletariat.

I'm getting down to literary study, and outlining my plans for further work. First and foremost—study, and again study....

Your *Kolya*

TO P. N. NOVIKOV

Moscow, April 4, 1932

Greetings from all the family.

Dear Petya and Mana, I'm still weak, after a second attack of pneumonia. Twice that bony old lady—Death—had me by the throat. But I hadn't the right to die just now. And so, after 47 abominable days, I'm beginning to come back. All of which explains why I haven't written.

Dear friends, this period has brought many pleasant developments for my book. Here they are, briefly.

The first three signatures of the book will come out on April 15, in No. 4 of the *Molodaya Guardia* magazine—organ of the League and Party Central Committees. The rest will come out in following issues. It will all appear in the magazine before it comes out in book form. As a book, it's to be out in time for the League anniversary. Tentatively, the printing is set at ten thousand copies.

The publishers want me to go on with the second part of the book. I've already been accepted as a member of the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers. This stupid illness has put off my work on the second part of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

The doors of life have opened wide before me. My dearest dream—return to active struggle—has come true.

I have every condition for creative work. Life is full, now, to overflowing. On—to labour, to growth, to achievement! Press my hands hard, dear comrades! My victory is your victory! Can you hear how happily my heart is beating? The first copy off the press goes to you, Petya and Mara!

Your *Kolya Ostrovsky*

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Moscow] May 7 [1932]

Shuna, dear friend,

It's a long time since I last wrote. And the same applies to you. No particular news. My health keeps badish. Neither well nor ill, but in any case—I haven't the strength to get any work done.

No. 4 of the *M.G.* mag[azine] only came out today. For the first time, I can think of part of my story as being in print.

If you remember, Shurochka, I asked you once to send me opinions on my work, if the comrades have given you any, so that I could study them. I can't manage to get hold of any here. They won't give them to me, blast them. Or perhaps they've simply mislaid them. I'd like to have an idea of my blunders before I start work on the second book, [to] avoid repeating them.

Old Fedenev carries through all my dealings with the publishers. Fortune herself sent him to me. He's been in the Party since 1904, and spent no little of his life in prisons.... He visits me often, now, and tells me all the news. And brings the money from the publishers, too....

I'm hoping for letters from you. If you can't get the *Molod[aya] Guardia* in Leningrad, I'll send you my proof

copies. Write me about everything—a good, long letter. I've been waiting ages for news from Leningrad. Regards from all our family. My love to Lyonya.

Your *Nikolai*

Can you make out what I write? I've asked you that before. And does it tire you too much—deciphering it all? If it does, I'll try to write still more carefully.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Moscow] May 20 [1932]

My own dear Shurochka,

... It seems they've been reading my novel in the culture and propaganda department of the League Central Committee, and formed a good opinion of it. Well, and they've decided to help me carry on with my creative work.

... Decision: to shift me at once from Moscow to Sochi—first to the Frunze sanatorium, and then to rooms of my own. I'm to stay in Sochi all summer, then back to Moscow for the winter, and the same every year.... It will all be organized very quickly. The C.C. will telegraph to Sochi to have rooms prepared for me, etc., etc.

Shurochka, dearest, then we meet in Sochi. How happy I'll be to see you!...

Let me know whether you have a copy of No. 4 of the *M.G.* If not, I'll send you one. Before the novel (I wanted it called simply a tale) they've published [my] letter to the ed[itorial board]. They never asked my permission for that. It doesn't seem proper—like an advertisement, almost. There are some terrible misprints. Careless work. The book will come out in five installments—five issues of the *M.G.* They've cut off the end—too long, and paper is scarce. And they've thrown out bits here and there, for

the same reason. Spoiled the book a little, but what's a person to do? It's only my first step....

I'll be waiting for letters from you. Will let you know of any new developments.

I press your hands.

Your *Nikolai*

Hearty greetings from all the family.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, Aug[ust] 7 [1932]

Shurochka, dearest,

Out in the fresh air all day, under some oak trees.

I've started working again. I must have chapter[9]. Send it to me, registered.

I'm expecting you out here, Shurochka. Try to get to the Krasnaya Moskva sanatorium. It's only 20 paces from here. How beautifully we'll spend September! We're wanting to see you, Mother and I.

The weather is fine just now, but we [had] 18 rainy days in July. Com. Fedenev has arrived, and brought a whole packet of news....

No more now. Send me chapter nine. The editors cut out half of it (the end) for [lack of] paper, and I'm shifting it to the second book.

Regards from Mother. Write!

Your *Kolya*

If you have any opinions on the manuscript, send them on.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] December 16 [1932]

Shura, dear friend,

I've been working hard on the second book. That's why I haven't written. Finished a big chapter yesterday, and today I'm taking a "day off."

In the next few days I'll finally get ten copies of my book from Moscow. I'll send you one right off, dear Shura!

One copy has come already. They've made a good job of it.... You'll soon see for yourself. The printing is 10,300 copies. Bound, and with a photograph of yours truly.

I've already written a quarter of the second book, trying hard for quality. Things are being written, here and there, about the first book; but it's not being abused too badly. The *M.G.* is planning a serious critical review. We shall see.

We're a family of three, here in Sochi just now. Besides Mother and myself, we have my brother's little daughter, Zina, aged 10, staying with us. The weather is cold. My health, so far, is passable—doesn't hinder me from working. But Mother keeps sighing all the time. She's weakened physically, and her will isn't what it was....

I come to the Party purge as a toiler again—no more an idler.

If there's any news, I'll let you know. Mother sends loving greetings.

Your Kolya

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[*Sochi*] December 22 [1932]

Dear Shurochka,

Your letter just received. Forgive me for not writing. I'm working my hardest. Will mail my book to you today.

How I wanted to see you, last summer! Well, I'll try hoping for a visit in 1933.

My conditions for work aren't easy, but I keep up the fight. Will send you the first few chapters.

I've a hunger for really strong people about me.

Mother isn't well at all. Sighing all the time, poor

thing. Which is not particularly inspiring. Persistence—that's my own weapon against all obstacles. And obstacles are legion. The days are grim and hard, but my whole life, my whole store of energy, is devoted to my book. I even write myself, by my own hand.

Remember me always. How fine it would be if you were here with me! I live in haste, dear friend. I must get something written, while my heart still beats.

Will write you often.

Your Kolya

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA*

Sochi, December 27, 1932

Dear Comrade Anna,

Am mailing the magazine two finished chapters of the second book of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. To you personally, I can admit how anxiously I'll be waiting for your judgement. You'll be able to say what the tendency is—up, or down. I mean, as compared with the literary and etc. level of the first book. If it's bad, be merciless. I won't lose my foothold. I can stand any criticism. It will only help me to eliminate shortcomings. Part of the material is still unprepared. I've kept my word not to bother you with endless letters—though I wanted badly to write to you. A person must spare other people's time, and not burden them with needless "literary efforts." Am mailing you and Kolosov special greetings in the shape of copies of my first book.... Working conscientiously. Interruptions are frequent, but not through any fault of mine. My desire to work is inversely proportional to the possibilities of working. And still—there's definite progress.

* Anna Alexandrovna Karavayeva—a writer, chief editor of the magazine *Molodaya Guardia*, in which *How the Steel Was Tempered* made its first appearance.—Ed.

I can't tell you how upset I was by the negligence about your foreword. The comrades at the pub[lishers'] can't seem to learn not to spoil every book, one way or another, even a book so well done technically (if we leave out of account no end of bad misprints).

My health doesn't hinder my work. It's cold in Sochi now, and dreary.

I'm brimming over with creative energy. But it often happens that I can't get that energy down on to paper, purely for lack of someone to dictate to. And that drives me mad. Writing myself, I work at a snail's pace. I tire out physically before the pictures in my mind have all been drawn. The turnover in my "secretarial staff" is simply monstrous. What a shame I can't apply the decree the Council of People's Commissars has issued against slackers! But I don't throw up the sponge, Comrade Anna. Put no faith in any malicious rumours—that I've "collapsed," or anything of the sort, or started writing some sort of melancholic tales. I keep persistently alive, in spite of all the doctors' predictions of death and disaster. I even laugh, sometimes. The learned medicos leave one thing out of account—the quality of the material their patient is made of. And that quality is what saves me. Your protégé is not only alive, but working. "Hearts that are dynamos—they can't but win," Pavka Korchagin declared in his fervent speech in 1921. And that applies to me, too.

I'll be waiting to hear from you.

Remember: you must write to me as soon as you've read the first chapters of the second book.

Greetings to Comrade Mark.

Nikolai Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[*Sochi*] January 29 [1933]

Dearest Shurochka,

Have you received the little parcel I mailed you on December 25? It contained my book....

My health betrayed me for a while, and kept me feverish. Caught cold. Not a line in 20 days. Now I'm back at work. The critics write too flatteringly of my book. For example, say, No. 12 (December) of the *Kniga Molodozhi* (*Books for the Youth*) magazine—p. 20.

I press your hands.

Please write.

Your Nikolai

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, April 20, 1933

Dear Comrade Anna,

I've sent the magazine six chapters—some 230 type-written pages in all. The remaining two chapters will be ready by May 15. The publishing house has agreed to a tentative limit of 15 signatures for the second book, and I've already turned in the greater part of that. Now only the end remains.

I'll be waiting for your judgement on the second book of *The Steel*. I don't overestimate it. I see all its shortcomings, and realize that only thorough study can help me to reach a higher level.

The Steel is a first casting, a work created in conditions that even a healthy man would find it hard to stand. Fortunately, I still have plentiful reserves of energy and of eagerness to improve. The only question is, whether I'll be able to win out against life for the three or four years that I must have for that. If I do, another book will follow. I'm sending you one of the reviews I've come across.

Perhaps you've seen it too. Also, an application addressed to the Writers' Union Organizational Committee. I'd like you to turn it in for me, if you have the opportunity.

The last chapters demand intensive work, and I'm keeping at it conscientiously. But my "technical staff" lets me down badly. My health is behaving very well. It doesn't hinder my work—and what more can I ask?

Spring doesn't come. It's cold and rainy. But May will bring the sunshine, and with it—new energy and cheer.

I press your hand.

N. Ostrovsky

TO HIS BROTHER AND FATHER

Sochi, May 6, 1933

Dear Mitya and Father,

I've had news from Kharkov that the Ukrainian League C.C. has decided to publish my book in our native language—Ukrainian. The translation will be done very quickly, and they'll start printing at the end of June, so that the book can come out for the fifteenth anniversary of the League. That's a great victory for me. And so—we'll soon see the book in our own tongue. Hail, life and the struggle for Socialism!

With Communist greetings,

N. Ostrovsky

TO KH. P. CHERNOKOZOV*

Sochi, May 15, 1933

Dear friend of mine, Khrisanf Pavlovich,

How happy I was to hear, today, that you're keeping up the fight, that your illness couldn't down you. That's

*Khrisanf Pavlovich Chernokozov—a friend of Ostrovsky's. Figures in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, without change of name.—Ed.

the best news of you I could have wished. Two comrades], Gritsenko and Odinetz, who used to work in Grozny, spoke so warmly to me about "Father"—about you, that is, and the work you're doing. I feel myself bound to you for always by our Bolshevik friendship—for aren't we, you and I, typical representatives of the old guard and the young guard of Bolshevism? It's three years, now, since I lost track of you, except for two times when I came across your name in the newspapers. I greet you from the heart, dear Khrisanf Pavlovich, as a son and as a friend. I wonder—do you remember your letter to Comrade Zemlyachka, in Moscow? I remember it well. You wrote, "I am confident, I am profoundly convinced that, in spite of his blindness and complete physical breakdown, Comrade Ostrovsky can yet be useful, will yet be useful to our Party."

And it makes me very happy to write to you that I have justified your faith, and the faith of many Old Bolsheviks, that I would yet return to the ranks, to the firing line of the advancing proletariat. It could not have been otherwise. No illness, no suffering can ever break a Bolshevik, one whose whole life has passed in struggle, and continues in unflagging struggle. True, it's two years now, and more, since I last walked. My health hasn't returned. I'm bound to my bed as before. But—I've shifted from the rear lines to the front. The literary front, this time—the only one that I can fight on now.

In 1932 I began working actively on the *Molodaya Guardia* magazine, as one of its literary editors. At the same time, I continued my work on a big book I was writing about our battle past: the Young Communist League in the flame of the Civil War. It was in 1932 that I finished the first book of this novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*. It came out in the *Molodaya Guardia* magazine, at first—Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 for 1932—and then, in October, in book form as well. Just now, I'm

finishing the last chapters of the second book of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, which covers the period from 1921 to 1930. This will come out in book form in July. The first book is being put out in Ukrainian, too. Last July the doctors exiled me from Moscow to Sochi. That was after an attack of pneumonia that nearly killed me. The C.C. helped to move me. And here I am, with no other work to do, finishing up the second book.

Mother is here with me. Raya's in Moscow, doing Party work at a canning factory. There you have a brief account of the past three years. Don't forget to come and see me, if you should be in Sochi, or I'll be mortally offended.

Sincerest greetings to your wife. Ask for my book at the library, and read it through. I press your hands, my dear, loved friend.

Your Nikolai Ostrovsky

I'll be waiting for your answer.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi [June 10, 1933]

My own dear friend, Shura,

I've been working hard, these last few months. That's why I haven't written.

I've finished and sent off to Moscow all of the second book of *How the Steel Was Tempered*—330 typewritten pages. And I'm tremendously tired. Trying to sleep off all those sleepless nights. When I've rested a little I'll write you a real letter. Write me quickly, all about yourself. When do I see you?

I have two nice rooms here.

I'll be waiting for letters from you. When will you be coming? Love from Mother.

Your Nikolai

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, June 22 [19]33

My own dear friend, Shurochka,

It's a long time since I last wrote you a real letter. Reason—intensive work. I've a number of victories and achievements to report on the literary front. Have finished the second book of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. The manuscript is in Moscow already, and they're preparing to print. It's to come out for the 15th anniversary of the Young Communist League. The Ukrainian C.C. [Y.C.L.] has decided to put out both books in Ukrainian, in one volume. The Young Bolshevik Publishing House (Kharkov) is to get it out for the 15th anniversary of the League. Printing—10,000 copies. Pankov helped me steer the book through all the publishers' blind alleys, and, to do him justice, he fought a good fight against red tape and bureaucracy. I sent the manuscript off to the Ukraine today, and now at last I have the right to rest. . . .

I'm in the best of spirits. And so I ought to be! A year's work done, and the results are not too bad. I've toed the line in every respect—so far as speed goes, and intensity of labour. As to the quality of what I've written—that the future will show. True, I'm tremendously tired physically. But that will pass.

You and Chernokozov figure in the second book. True, I never asked your permission. But what the pen has written, the axe cannot erase, as the old saying goes.

I'll be writing often now. You see, I've given myself a "vacation." Will be waiting for your answer, Shurochka.

Materially, things have *improved considerably* of late. I press your hands. *Till we meet—and soon!*

Your Kolya Ostrovsky

TO R. B. LYAKHOVICH

[Sochi] October 15, 1933

Rosochka,

Received your letter from Yalta. The youth here keep me in a whirl. You may not know it, but I'm an honorary member of the town League organization. All the Sochi units are discussing my book, as part of the preparations for the 15th League anniversary. It's being broadcast over the local radio. And—there's not enough books to go round. Such a fix! The unit secretaries come to me, demanding copies. And I haven't any to give them.

Rosochka, let me give you a little job to do. Go to some big library, or send somebody, and get one copy, at least, if you can't get more. And send it to me, dear girl, as fast as you can. That will be a great help. My rooms are like a club, these days. Meetings of the district committee, meetings of active League members, etc. I keep busy, writing articles and leading a study circle. The second book will soon be out. Love from Mother.

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

[Sochi] October 25, 1933

Dear Shurochka,

Your letter brought me so much happiness: for one thing, I had word from you, and for another—I'm to see you! I must admit I'd lost all hope of that. Now I hardly want to write, we're to meet so soon. Writing isn't the same, especially by another's hand.

Here's a brief report. The Ukrainian League C.C. has decided to award me some sort of prize to mark the League anniversary. (What sort of prize, I don't know yet. They're keeping it a secret.) From Moscow, I'm informed that my book is being translated into the languages of

several of our Soviet nationalities. There's an anniversary symposium coming out, in which our League comrades praise me to the skies as one of the hardest to down of all our brotherhood. The Sochi Leaguers have exchanged my old, fighting membership book for me, and now—beside its rightful Dad, my Party membership book, lies a little book made out to N. A. Ostrovsky, Young Communist League member since 1919. The number on the book is 8144911.

How much there is I want to tell you! Three years since we last met, and so much has happened in those years. Our meeting is a great joy to look forward to. It will bring back all that's been forgotten—because you *have* begun to forget me, haven't you, and time has faded my picture in your memory. Find out all details you can about the film. I'll be expecting you, dear Shura.

Your Kolya

TO KH. P. CHERNOKOZOV

Sochi, December 15, 1933

Dear Khrisanf Pavlovich,

Shura and I are writing this to you because we're so happy to learn that you're alive. (Shura's been taking a cure here in Sochi. She goes back to Leningrad tomorrow.) You see, the chairman of the Sochi Soviet, who knew you in Grozny, came to see me one day and said, "Chernokozov's been killed, out in the mountains." You can imagine how I felt about it. And then, the other day, we discovered it wasn't true. Shura met an engineer at the sanatorium where she's been staying, a non-Party comrade, from the Grozny oil-fields, and he told her you were alive and working. Our greetings to you, dear friend.

Did you ever get the huge letter I sent you, with an account of my life in the last three years? I addressed it to you at the regional trade-union council. Ask your young folk to get you my book from the library—*How the Steel Was Tempered*. I'll mail you the second part as soon as it comes out. That will be a month or so from now. There's a few words about you, too, in the second part. I'll be waiting to hear from you. Send me your home address, and I'll send it on to Leningrad, too, to Shura Zhigareva. I'll be waiting—don't you forget! When your letter comes I'll write you more about myself. I'm keeping alive, as you know, and relatively well, and my spirit holds. The past year's work hasn't been too bad, or so it seems to me. I'm writing for the youth, about our past. Living in Sochi, for the time being. Planning to move to Moscow.

As to Shura Zhigareva, she's keeping on much as before—working at the Communist University, training Party cadres, bringing up the youth. Give your wife my regards, and also Shura Zhigareva's. If she remembers us! Best wishes to you.

Your Nikolai Ostrovsky and Shura Zhigareva

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, December 25, 1933

Dear Comrade Anna,

They've just read me your special delivery letter.... I've lost all count of undelivered mail. And the missing of your letters, and Sonya's,* was no small thing for me. I drew my own conclusions, and I must admit my conclusions weren't cheering. While I'm at it, I must say a few words about our literary contact generally. It hardly exists, dear Comrade Anna. In fifteen months, I've only had one letter from you devoted to serious criticism. And

* Sofya Markovna Stesina—an editorial worker on the staff of the *Molodaya Guardia* magazine.—Ed.

yet you know how tremendously I want to be told what's bad about my work, and why—to be told in the process of my work, not afterwards. That's why I've been sending it on to you, chapter by chapter. That's why I've asked you so urgently, a dozen times or more, to answer at once, and "open fire" at me. Just try to imagine how you've let me down. A military staff straightens out the line of advance right in the field, while the battle is in the fighting. Had you come down on me earlier, while the book was in process of formation, that would have helped me tremendously. All my life, I've tried to learn from elder Bolsheviks, from those who know more than me, in every sphere of the struggle. My yearning for knowledge is insatiable. I feel the deepest respect for those who taught me to be not too bad a fighter for our cause. And from you, too, dear comrades, I want the same sort of teaching.

As to the reviews. They can be helpful when a book has just come out, and the author is preparing to begin some new work. But I get reviews of my first book when I've already written my second. And the new work repeats the shortcomings of the old. The chief trouble in my case, of course, Comrade Anna, lies in the distance separating us. How many pages would be filled by a stenographic record of that talk we had together, still so fresh in my memory! Remember how you said, "We don't believe in levelling." And that's true all around, so far as my treatment in the *M.G.* is concerned. A comrade I don't know personally—I can't recall [his name]—accused the magazine once of lack of proper pride in the young people it's brought forward. I can't agree with him—so far as I'm concerned, at any rate. There's hardly an issue of the *M.G.* that doesn't carry at least a few kind words about your protégé. And now your last letter—it's melted all the ice I'd been beginning to feel. Its warmth brought me great happiness, and—even more valuable!—a great eagerness to carry on with my work. You mustn't be sur-

prised, Comrade Anna, that I'm so sensitive. The fault lies in the circumstances of my life. Your news that my book will start appearing with the January issue brings tremendous moral satisfaction. Need I say that a refusal to carry it in the magazine would have meant defeat for me, a defeat that the printing of the book in Moscow and in Kharkov could never have relieved. But the danger signal remains. I've grasped that, and given it much thought. You were right in your speech at the Organizational Committee, that "with every year it's harder to get into print." Harder, not because of lack of interest, but because the demands of our readers, in their millions, are rising steadily. I'm studying hard. It's not easy, alone. Material is scarce, and I've no qualified comrades here to help me. And even so, I can feel the narrow limits of my own tiny personal experience and cultural acquirements broadening out. If I don't die, by pure chance, of some idiotic illness or other, I dare hope that some day I'll be able to please you, too, and make up for the disappointment my second book has brought you.

How I've spent the last three months, you ask. Well—I've stolen a great deal of time from my literary studies, and given it to the youth. Instead of a lone hand, I've become a worker among the masses. The bureau of the town committee meets in my rooms. I'm leading a Party study circle, and I've been made chairman of the district council for cultural work. In a word, I've got thoroughly involved in practical Party activities, and become rather a useful fellow. True, I spend a vast amount of energy on it. But life is so much happier this way! Youth Leaguers always around me. And all the work there is to do, on the cultural front! Take the city libraries—badly neglected, with miserly budgets, and chaos on their shelves and in their catalogues. Now they're coming to life and beginning to serve their purpose. I've organized a literary group, and lead it to the best of my ability. The Party and

League committees are very helpful and attentive to me and to my work. The leading Party members often visit me. I have my finger on the pulse of life. Yes, I've spent these months on practical work with a very definite aim in mind. I want to get the feel of the time, of what's going on around me now, today. I can't get all I want to tell you into this one letter. I'd like to write you again, if my letters don't bore you. For all my work, I get a lot of reading done as well. In these months I've read Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*, Vera Figner's *Reminiscences*, German's *Accession; The Last of the Udeghe; Steep Ascent; Anna Karenina; Literary Heritage*; every issue of *Literary Criticism*; Turgenev's *A Nest of the Gentry*, and much else besides. I'd like very much for you to write me what you think I had best work on in future. What sort of topic? Knowing me as you do, you should have something interesting to advise. What do you think I could best deal with—what sort of topic? Don't forget to answer. I'm very much interested in your ideas about it. Will think over your suggestion about an article for the "Reader and Author" section of the magazine.

I press your hand, Comrade Anna. Warmest greetings to Comrade Mark. Tomorrow I start reading his *Selected Stories*. Long live and prosper our creative friendship.

With all respect,

N. Ostrovsky

Written for me at my request.

TO A. I. PUZYREVSKY*

Sochi, December 26, 1933

Dear Alexander,

Rosa writes me that she saw you at the C.C. Yes, I'm alive, brother, and hoping to see you if you come to Sochi.

* Alexander Iosifovich Puzyrevsky—a friend of Ostrovsky's. Appears in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, without change of name.—Ed.

Not only alive, but back in action again. I've written two volumes of a novel called *How the Steel Was Tempered*. You'll find a few lines in it about one Alexander Puzyrevsky, not the least of proletarian fighters. I've a warm place in my heart for you, brother of mine, and I'm hoping to see you. To see you full of energy, as I always knew you. With me, now, life is good. I've left that rear-line idleness. Back at the front again.

Your N. Ostrovsky

TO A. I. PUZYREVSKY

Sochi, January 16, 1934

Dear Alexander,

Received your letter. I hope our correspondence will keep up. That will depend on you. I'd be very glad to see you. You can't find my book in the shops, you say. Well, that doesn't surprise me. I'm searching for it myself, all over the U.S.S.R., and can't find it anywhere. Funny, isn't it? But that's how it is. The first book of *How the Steel Was Tempered* came out in 10,000 copies. That's not much. A second, mass edition—100,000 copies—will soon be out. The second book is coming out in Moscow in a few days, and I'll send you a copy as soon as it gets to me. Can't send you the first book, because I've already given away every copy I had. Yes—both books are coming out in Kharkov too, in Ukrainian, in April. They'll be in one volume. Printing—10,000 copies. Also, the first book came out in the *Molodaya Guardia* magazine, 1932, Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The second book is also appearing in the same magazine. And, be it noted, one Alexander Puzyrevsky figures in the first chapter of the second book. In the first book I've put you into Chapter 8, as the regiment commander (Uman section of the South-Western Front,

1920). You won't find the book anywhere but in the library.

As to reviews of the book, look in the *Rost (Growth)* magazine, Nos. 11-12 for 1933, and the *Molodaya Gvardia*, No. 5 for 1933. I won't list any more. There—that's how things stand on the literary front.

Am working hard, and also getting a lot of reading done. Young people, Youth Leaguers, around me all the time. Life has sharply changed its course. The one bad thing is my health. It's fragile as tissue paper. Almost died, in 1932, of pneumonia, and the doctors drove me away from Moscow, down to the South. I'd turn up my toes, they said, without air. And so, like it or not, I have to stay here in Sochi, when my heart keeps pulling Moscow-ward. When you come, Sasha, you'll be glad, I'm sure, to see that this brother of yours hasn't buckled under, after all. No, he's surprised everyone—scrambled out of the slough of invalidism on to the big open road, and stopped being a burden to the victorious proletariat. That last was added just to see how it would sound.

Write me your home address, and introduce me to your wife. When you get hold of my [book], ask her to read it and write me what she thinks of it. Got a letter from Kharkov, yesterday, and it turns out that a group of nationalists at the Young Bolshevik Publishing House have been sabotaging my book. They've been dragged out into the light of day, now, and things will go much faster. Petlura supporters—of course they didn't like my book!

If there's any news, I'll let you know. Best wishes.

Your N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, April 1, 1934

Dear Comrade Anna,

Your letter was just read to me. Such a good day today: a letter from you, and another letter with the news that Maxim Gorky will publish an article soon on the mortal sins of a certain protégé of yours. I'll get it badly, Comrade Anna, because, after all, I messed it up badly enough—that first try of mine at literature. I'm a little afraid, I must admit. Our great teacher strikes out hard, particularly of late, at one and another new-baked "glory-rider." True, I haven't got that last on my conscience. But still, I'm uneasy about what Gorky will have to say.

Back again to your letter. Yes, I'll be glad to work on an article on literary language, for the magazine. It's such a huge problem, and such an urgent one—and not only for the present day. I'd been thinking of writing on this subject before, and I've already planned it out in my mind—which means that the most important part of the work is done. I'll start writing tomorrow, and a week from tomorrow I'll have it typed and send it off to your home address, special delivery.

I've almost died again, Comrade Anna, as I suppose you know. Of the most idiotic illness a person could imagine. Where on earth it came from is more than anyone can say. It was a hard fight, for all of a month. But it's all over now, and I'm getting stronger daily.

As to the topic of my new book, I'll write you about that later. Your sketch is tremendously interesting. It's an inexhaustible subject—the splendid young "hero of our time." I'm planning to write you oftener than I used, Comrade Anna. There are times when I want to tell you so many things about my ideas and plans.

Nos. 1 and 2 of the magazine received. Ask them to do the same with the next issues—send them on to me as soon as they come in.

Reading through the first chapters, I feel the nip of your "scissors" here and there. I'm not complaining about the good-for-nothing bits that deserved to be thrown out—the student gang, and other such things. What I mean are the cuts that spoil the text, the ones that are only done for the sake of economizing paper. But on the whole I can't complain, except for a few bad misprints that distort the sense. In Chapter 2, for instance, where it should read, "And all this with the help of the collective," the magazine says, "And all this with the yelp...."

Comrade Anna! I appeal to you and Mark to help out with the publication of a mass edition. I get scores of letters from League organizations in the Ukraine and other parts of the country. And they all make the same complaint: the book is not to be gotten. It's been drowned in the sea of readers. The magazine text is the one chiefly read, for lack of the book. Shepetovka, for instance, hasn't a single copy of the book.

And another thing. You know about my friends, Comrade Anna. They call me a "communized idealist," and all sorts of other unflattering names, where economic, etc., questions are concerned. They may annoy you, without bothering to ask permission from me. And I feel very bad about it. Please don't take anything they may say or do as coming from me.

Your *Nikolai O.*

Dear Comrade Anna,

It's quite possible that my letters to you, and all my letters generally, are peppered with mistakes in spelling and grammar. None of my secretaries, unfortunately, are too literate.

N. O.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, May 9, 1934

Dear Shurochka of mine,

I haven't written for ages. Neither have you. But I can forgive you, because our friendship has never been measured by the number of letters written.

My health is not bad. I've completely recovered from my illness. Will soon start working.

The weather is beautiful. True, a little rain would be better for the fields. Dry weather now is bad for the harvest.

I've gone over the first book, editing it for the new edition that's coming out in June—both books in one volume, in a "de luxe" edition, as the editors [boast]. They're even planning a fancy cardboard box for the book. Trying to show off, for the writers' congress.

Am expecting an opinion from Gorky. Serafimovich came to see me, day before yesterday. And I get very pleasant letters, from everywhere. I'm a capable lad, people write me, and if I don't start drinking, or fault-finding, why, perhaps something may come of me....

I must shift to Moscow for the winter. I need study, and trained advice, and a lit[erary] atmosphere, and etc., and etc. Am doing a great deal of reading.

What news with you? ... I'll be so happy to have you here this summer. See that you come, then, Shurochka!...

The Council of People's Commissars has assigned me a special pension.

Warmest greetings from all the family.

I'm expecting the second book any day now. Will send you a copy as soon as it comes.

Your N. Ostrovsky

TO R. B. LYAKHOVICH

Sochi, June 24, 1934

Rosochka,

Just received your letter. You try to tell me, little girl, that I've forgotten you, that I've grown conceited, and all that sort of thing. That's all wrong, of course. My memory is very good, and conceit has never been my element. The trouble is, I simply haven't got the time, or the physical strength, to answer my friends' letters regularly. I get a great heap of letters every day—urgent letters, many of them, demanding immediate decision. And I haven't the strength to cope with them all. And so, please don't talk nonsense. After all, you must be a grown woman now, isn't that so? And not the child you were all those years ago!

... And so, you're planning to move to Kiev. That's a place of pleasant memories. The best years of our lives were spent there. The first three chapters of the second book are laid in Kiev. No particular news to write. I've been made a member of the Soviet Writers' Union. The Ukrainian edition will be coming out in the next few days, and I believe it's been well done. And the second Moscow edition will also be out soon. I'm thinking of shifting to Moscow for the winter, if I can get rooms there. I need Moscow, for study and literary advance. Will mail you the second book as soon as I get my copies of it. Raya's thinking of a visit here in August. Katya isn't at all well. The doctors say it's tuberculosis. I'll have to send her off somewhere for a thorough cure. Mother's health is very bad, too, and I'm taking steps to send her to a sanatorium. Father's terribly old, hardly able to get around. Katya's the only lively one of us all. So that, you see, my surroundings aren't very creative of energy. But that gives me no right to get into the dumps. No—life is struggle, struggle to overcome the obstacles in the way to our goal.

I keep studying. Do a lot of reading, making a real study of the best of our classical heritage. Without study, without mental growth, how can I create a new book that will be more vivid, more powerful than my first?

Rosa! I've discovered, by pure chance, that Petya and my Party friends are raising some sort of question about me at the C.C. again. I've written to Petya, protesting categorically. How many times I've begged my friends, demanded of them, that they leave me in peace and let me work. I'm not made of iron—remember that. You can imagine my state of mind when I hear about all these things! What will the comrades in the C.C. think of it? And what's it all about? My life today is wonderful to me. My dearest of dreams has come true. I'm a fighter again, not a useless comrade to the Party. I've found my place in the life of our country. Why should my friends pain me so? Why spend so much energy, worthy of better use, on burdening the C.C. with questions about my life and all its petty details? They know very well that I forbid anyone, everyone, to do anything of the kind. There—I think that's all. I press your hand.

N. Ostrovsky

If you'd like me to send you a few photographs—group shots, and shots of Serafimovich and me—ask Abram to get me some good paper.

Regards from all the family.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, June 26, [19]34

Dear Shurochka,

Just received your letter. I understand, and I'm not hurt. I'm terribly sorry you're feeling so ill—terribly sorry. That's the worst thing, the most wretched thing of all.

What news, you ask.

I've been made a member of the Writers' Union. That's an honour, now. They took me in on credit, of course, for the books I'm still to write.

I'm eager to work—there's the honest truth. I'm hindered at times, but that's no fault of mine. I've too many visitors—you're right about that. There are days when I'm absolutely exhausted, and then lie awake till four in the morning. That's too much. I've looked over my list of visitors, and cut it by half—and still they take up half my time. I'll have to cut it another fifty per cent. Every hour is precious.

I'm studying hard, and reading extensively, preparing for a big new piece of work. And empty talk and chatter are simply a criminal waste of time, with my health sliding so fast....

Will send you the second book in a few days....

For the winter, I'd like to get back to Moscow. It's essential for my studies. If only I can get rooms, I'll go.

Sochi is building fast. You can hardly get to the sea-shore, for the scaffolding, people say.

Mother's not well. We're thinking of sending her to a sanatorium. I'm looking for a place. Let her rest, and get some treatment, for once in her life.

There will be a second edition out in Moscow in July—de luxe! I'll send you a copy. And a third, mass edition—100,000 [copies]—by the end of the year.

... It's been raining here too, though the weather keeps warm. The state of the crops is good. The drought ended in time.

No, to my sorrow, I've only once been out under the trees. But I'll soon be able to spend more of my time there.

As to the film—thanks for the information. If there's anything new, I'll let you know. So I won't see you this year. That's a disappointment....

Regards from all.

Your Kolya

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, August 29, 1934

Dear Comrade Anna,

Your letter has just been read to me. Like the bright sun, warming my heart! I'll be hoping for success for your plans and efforts to get me to Moscow. I won't let myself think of failure. So many splendid people working for it—how can they fail?

I press your hands, my own good Comrade Karavayeva.

With all respect, *N. Ostrovsky.*

The Ukrainian League C.C. has passed a decision for *The Steel* to be discussed at all League units, schools, and study circles in the Ukraine. I must say, I never expected anything like that. I read all the speeches. In heart, I'm there-with you. How life calls on us to be alive!

TO B. MARCHLEWSKA*

Sochi, October 17, 1934

Dear Com[rade] Marchlewska,

Comrade Fedenev has sent me your letter, so warm and friendly.

If only my hopes come true and I return to Moscow, I'll be heartily glad to see you and to hear you tell of the unforgettable past, of those who form the pride of the Comintern, the pride of our young people—those whose lives were devoted to the cause of proletarian revolution.

For my part, I shall do my utmost to record in literary form at least some morsel of this splendid past.

I press your hands.

* Bronislawa Marchlewska—the widow of J. M. Marchlewski, outstanding Polish revolutionary.—Ed.

If the comrades who are trying to get me to Moscow are persistent enough, we will soon meet.

With deep respect,

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, November 17, 1934

Dear Comrade Anna,

... A friend of mine is leaving for Moscow the day after tomorrow. I've asked him to buy me whatever books he can find on our war with the Polish Whites.

Am beginning work on my new book, sketching its first rough outline....

My health is good. My mood, I must admit—a little anxious.

Your visit brought you so much nearer to me, and left such a warm, friendly feeling.

I'm the most troublesome, I suppose, of all your literary pupils, of all those you've helped into the world of writing. There's no end to the trouble I give you. But a day will come when all is well at last, and you'll be freed of all this bother and anxiety.

I press your hand.

With all respect, *N. Ostrovsky*

Greetings to you and to Comnade Karavayev, from our whole "kolkhoz."

TO B. MARCHLEWSKA

[*Sochi*] *November 22, 1934*

Dear Com[nade] Marchlewska,

Received your letter, of course. I'm grateful for your interest....

And so, the forces are gathered in Moscow, and I'm

expecting decision soon. The question of rooms is a very difficult one, of course, and not so simple of solution.

Be that as it may, however, I must get down to work. And from the very first I'm held up by an utter lack of historical material. I have no books, no pamphlets, no articles, military or political, dealing with our relations with Poland through 1918, 1919, 1920. What I can recall of material read long since, and of what I myself witnessed or was told by others, is far from sufficient to form the groundwork of a political novel. I must read through everything again, study it thoroughly, before I can generalize upon it.

I would be very grateful if you could find out for me, from Comrade Butkiewicz or other comrades who may know about these things, what books have come out in Russian dealing with these questions, and where they can be bought.

Perhaps there are memoirs—and perhaps they have been translated from Polish into Russian—by Pilsudski, say, or some other leader of the Polish Whites. It would be useful to me to go through such fascist literature. The enemy must be studied, if the blow is to be struck home. I want particularly to show the beginnings, and then the gathering of forces, of our fraternal Polish Communist Party.

No amount of books, of course, can take the place of what real, live people can tell me of the real, live people of those days. For in a work of fiction it is the people portrayed that matter most of all. And that, again, makes Moscow essential to me, makes it essential that I be able to meet you, to meet those Polish Bolsheviks with whom you could bring me into contact....

Do forgive me for the trouble I must be giving you by all these requests, and also for the way my friends have asked your help in the attempt to get me to Moscow.

I press your hand.

With deep respect,

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. I. PUZYREVSKY

Sochi, November 23, 1934

Dear Sashko,

No, I've never forgotten you, nor do I now. It's simply that I've begun ailing rather too often. But I try to hold on, in spite of everything. I was happy to see the comrades. There's a great wish I have—to get to Moscow. Only I don't know whether anything will come of it. That will be settled in the next few days. It doesn't depend on me. But if I stay here in Sochi for the winter, I'll be tremendously happy to see you. Be sure you come! The weather's begun to spoil. Rainy, and damp. But we'll put a special order in for sunny days to meet you. Eh, Sashko, Sashko, but life is good! Only one thing lacking: a little physical vigour.

No more now. Will write again when everything is settled. Best wishes. I press your hands.

Nikolai Ostrovsky

Regards to your family. And—write. I'm always happy to hear from you.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, February 2 [19]35

Dear Shurochka,

... Mailed you both books of the new edition of *The Steel*. . . . But it turns out they never reached you. Will mail both again tomorrow.

If you possibly can, Shurochka, I wish you'd go to that meeting of Old Bolsheviks, and try to jot down what the "old folk" have to say. It's tremendously important to me. I mean, their discussion of the book.

My health is satisfactory. Am working on my new novel. . . .

I press your tiny hand.

Kolya

TO A READER,
YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE
MEMBER KHARCHENKO

[Sochi] February 19, 1935

... You protest against the merciless way in which the author of *How the Steel Was Tempered* cripples one of the characters—Pavel Korchagin. I can understand your feeling of protest. That is the natural reaction of youth, alive with energy and enthusiasm. The heroes of our land are strong not only in spirit, but physically as well. And were it in my power—that is, were Korchagin purely the creation of my pen—he would be drawn strong and healthy as he was courageous.

But, to my sorrow, Korchagin is drawn from life. And this very letter is being written in his room. I'm visiting him. Pavlusha Korchagin is an old friend of mine, and fellow-fighter. That is why I was able to portray him with such warm feeling.

There he lies before me, smiling and cheerful.

For six years, now, he's been tied to his bed. He's started a new novel, which we'll soon see in print.

The heroes of this new novel are young people, handsome, healthy, full of vigour. Our country's amazing youth!

Pavel sends you his greetings.

"Tell her," he says, "to build herself happiness. And happiness lies in the building of the new life, in the work of remaking, retraining man—now the master of his country; the new man, great and wise—the man of Socialism. The struggle for Communism, true friendship, love, youth—all that is for man, that he may be happy."

Be a good fighter, Comrade Kharchenko!

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. I. PODGAYETSKAYA*

Sochi, February 20, 1935

Good day to you, Comrade Podgayetskaya!

It was pleasant to read your letter. The youth, you write, is responding warmly to my book. That makes my happiness greater still.

I'm hard at work on my new book—*Born of the Storm*. Several chapters are already done. This book, too, is for the youth, and it, too, is set in the stormy year 1918. By August it will be finished, and the C.C.—stern judge—will say what it thinks of it.

From the Ukrainian C.C. I have news of discussions of my book in all League units. The same at Berezniki, and the same in Leningrad. Yes, life is worth living, in our happy times. I've only one regret—that the days are so short, and my strength too little to embrace even some fraction of the infinite, the unembraceable. Of course I'll see the comrades who want to meet me. With pleasure. Give them my greetings.

I'd like to know, Comrade Podgayetskaya, whether you keep all the responses from readers about my book, whether you have them filed together somehow. You see, they're tremendously important to me. I must read all of them through, one day.

We mustn't lose contact. Write me about anything you receive of any interest. And don't forget to send me No. 4 of the *Kommunisticheskaya Molodyozh* (*Communist Youth*)—the issue that article was published in.

I press your hand.

With Communist greetings,

N. Ostrovsky

* Antonina Ivanovna Podgayetskaya—a member of the staff of the Molodaya Gvardia publishing house.—Ed.

TO I. P. FEDENEV*

Sochi, April 5, 1935

Dear Innokenti Pavlovich,

I've suddenly taken ill. Double pleurisy. Fever, palpitation, insomnia, and the like "pleasant" complications. The doctors absolutely forbid me to work, or even to read—and this at the height of my creative inspiration. You can imagine my temper! I enclose a copy of a letter from the Ukrainian film studio. All of life calls on me to work, to be active—and I can't respond. We're fighting the illness. I obey the doctors implicitly, in the hope of getting back to work as soon as possible.

I press your hands, dear friend.

And hope soon to inform you that I'm well again, and back at work.

Your *Kolya*

**TO THE EDITORIAL BOARD
OF THE *BOLSHEVISTSKAYA PRAVDA*,
ORGAN OF THE VINNITSA REGIONAL COMMITTEE
OF THE UKRAINIAN C.P.(B.)**

Sochi, April 14, 1935

Dear Comrades,

Received your letter yesterday. You ask me to send you a few pages from my new novel, and to write you how my work is progressing. I hasten to reply. Am mailing you the rough draft of Chapter 4 of *Born of the Storm* (the title is not yet final). For publication, I recommend the end of the chapter—as much or as little as your paper can place.

Here is a brief résumé of the story. You might use it as an introduction.

* Innokenti Pavlovich Fedenev—a friend of Ostrovsky's. Figures in *How the Steel Was Tempered* as Ledenev.—Ed.

Born of the Storm is an anti-fascist novel. Time, the end of 1918. Place, a town in the West Ukraine, and Eastern Galicia. Harried by the Red partisans, the German forces of occupation flee the Ukraine. The Polish Whites—landowners, manufacturers, bankers—seize power in the town, and prepare to resist the approaching revolutionary detachments. The Polish fascists are led by Count Mogelnicki, Prince Zamojski, sugar manufacturer Banankiewicz, landowner Zajaczkowski, Captain Wrona, Lieutenant Zaremba, and a Catholic priest, Father Hieronim.

The Communists, too, prepare for struggle. An underground Party regional committee is set up. The underground Young Communist League group is a loyal helper in the Party's work. Fathers and children stand shoulder to shoulder in the bitter fight against blood-stained Polish fascism. Here they are, this youth: Olesya, daughter of an underground fighter, pump-house mechanic Kovallo; Rajmond Rajewski, son of a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party; Andri Ptakha, a young stoker whom the underground steels and disciplines.

With Communist greetings,

N. Ostrovsky

**TO THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF THE MAGAZINE
*INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE***

Sochi, April 20, 1935

Dear Comrades,

Your letter, when it was read to me, brought back the past, still so clear in memory. Cavalry, drawn up in close ranks. Seven hundred men sit their mounts like statues. Even the horses are still, obedient. The brigade commander, a man steeled in battle and not easily to be moved, reads aloud an Order of the Day. Plain, simple

words enough. But—your heart leaps, it calls you forward, as the commander reads: "For courage and resource displayed in battle, the command expresses its thanks...." And the signature, so inexpressibly heart-held. You grip the reins so hard that your knuckles begin to ache. Such words—they are a summons.... I hope that this letter you have sent me will not be the last. No one can seek so eagerly as I those whose experience is so essential to the beginner. I'm sure that you will write to me how your decision to translate is working out. You will understand how impatiently I'll be looking forward to your letters. My heart beats high at the thought that *The Steel* is to cross the border.

I only got back to work a few days ago, after a stupid, needless illness that kept me idle all of six weeks. And now I'm altogether absorbed in my work—difficult work it is, but so wonderfully beautiful, so full of happiness for me.

I'm expecting visitors from Kiev in the next few days—from the Ukrainian film studio, to work on a film script of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. The Byelorussian C.C. informs me that the book is being translated into Byelorussian. That will be the sixth language, within the Soviet Union. Day after tomorrow I'm to report on my work at a meeting of the Sochi Party Committee, to be held at my home.

I never dreamed that life could bring me such tremendous happiness. My fearful tragedy has been routed and destroyed. Life is full to overflowing with the all-conquering joy of creative labour. And who can say when I was happier—when I was young and strong and well, or today?

I want you to feel the warm pressure of my hand.

N. Ostrovsky

TO M. Z. FINKELSHTEIN

Sochi, April 26, 1935

Dear Misha and Tiny,*

I'm alive, my illness conquered. Working like a conscientious ox—from morning to night, until my last ounce of strength is gone. After which I go peacefully to sleep, knowing that the day behind me has been lived as it should.

Don't be angry, dear friends, that I don't write.

My information office—Mother and Katya—don't seem to be coping with their job at all. I've asked them to keep my friends informed of all developments. I suppose you know about the translation into German, French, and English undertaken by the *International Literature* magazine. Also, the translation into Byelorussian, in Minsk. On May 3 I'm expecting a director and a scenarist from the Ukrainian studio to work with me on a film script of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

I'm altogether absorbed in my work. Everything else is secondary. Hail, labour in the Land of Socialism!

I never forget you, dear friends. I want you to know that. Only—if God isn't blind, he can bear witness that I'm no idler.

I must make haste to live—remember that! Like a good battle-horse, I'm racing to reach the goal before the life goes out of me.

I'm a happy fellow—happy to have lived to days like this, when I've no time to pause, when every minute is precious. Yes, happy to feel that all the past is mine again—struggle and labour, participation in our construction work, the joy of victory, the bitterness of failures. Is not that happiness?

* Misha—Mikhail Zinovyevich Finkelshtein, a friend of Ostrovsky's; Tiny—his wife.—Ed.

Lay your hand on my heart. You'll feel its beat—120 a minute, never less, because life has come to be so wonderful here in our land!

Don't you startailing, Mishenka. Summer's on the way, and the Moscow sunshine with it . . . Hearty May Day greetings. I press your hands, dear imps.

Drink a glass to our struggle, our happiness, our friendship.

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, May 2, 1935

Dear Anna Alexandrovna,

Received your telegram. Have mailed the bit you sanction to the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. I've had two express telegrams from them, urgently requesting all the finished chapters of my new book for serial publication in the paper. Am writing them today that, if they want to publish, they must get your permission. No publication without that. Of course, their offer is very tempting. But for one thing, I belong to the *Molodaya Guardia*, and discipline above all else. And for another, the book is still in process of work. It hasn't been through your critical fire as yet. And that's what I'm writing to the comrades on the *K.P.* Am waiting for your appraisal of the first chapters. May Day was splendid. After the demonstration all the leading comrades of the town Party Committee, the command of the border detachment, and the editor of the *Molot*—the territorial newspaper—came to spend the day with me. A film director and scenarist are on their way from Kiev to work with me on the script of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

I've received an excerpt from the minutes of a meeting of the Bureau of the Ukrainian League C.C., recording the decision to film my novel and naming the comrades

appointed to see this work through. Am writing this hastily, in a short breathing spell. Visitors coming soon—local League members. We'll have a jolly time. The Party Committee has given me a phonograph, as a reward "for shock work on the literary front."

I press your hands. Hearty greetings from all the family.

Your N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, May 25, 1935

Dear Anna Alexandrovna,

The Sochi Party Committee is mailing to the magazine today the stenographic record of a Bureau meeting at which I reported on my work. If you think it worth while, you may print it in the magazine. My days are rushing faster and faster. Life bursts in on me, insistent, not to be held back, demanding imperiously all that I can give it, to my last ounce of health and energy. You'll say that's wrong, of course, a Left-ist deviation. But I haven't the power to resist. Take the huge piles of letters, say, pouring in from League organizations and from different comrades. They must be answered. What wonderful letters! How deeply moving! Only now am I beginning to realize the aspirations the book has roused in the minds of the youth. I enclose two such letters.

You know, I've been ordered to take a month off. The comrades are worried by something or other that the doctors say. I'll have to submit.

Only—the film comrades have come, and the script has to be written.

I'm an infant at that sort of thing. But the Ukrainian C.C. has called on me to help. After all, it's really a matter of honour that our Y.C.L. film work out vivid and moving. And all that takes so much energy. Whereas I've

spent all the energy I had, to the very last. I must have a break, to rally my strength again. And another thing —the endless stream of visitors, almost impossible to escape.

Yet for all that, Comrade Anna, I'm infinitely happy. I could never have dreamed, even, of such a turn in my life.

When my vacation begins I'll write you more, and more concretely. Now, I can't concentrate. Too many things to think about.

Regards to all.

I press your hand, dear comrade of mine.

In the main, I agree with your critical remarks. I've already made the changes they call for, and crossed out the chaff that had stolen somehow into my work.

Devotedly, *N. Ostrovsky*

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, May 31 [1935]

Today is my last day of work. Vacation starts tomorrow. All my literary affairs have been put in order. Am busy writing to my friends. No serious work allowed for all the month ahead. I'm to rest "in mind and body."

Don't be surprised if I don't write you, in these weeks. I'd like to receive letters, lots of them. But I shan't write much myself.

The Territory Committee has sent me a splendid radio set. All Europe, brought right into my room.

And so, I'll be expecting letters from you, about everything and everyone.

I press your hand.

N. Ostrovsky

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, August 2, 1935

Dear Anna Alexandrovna,

The Central Board of the Soviet Writers' Union informs me of an approaching literary discussion devoted to the work of N. Ostrovsky, with a report by you. I'll be waiting impatiently for the stenographic record. It's some time since I wrote you last. Forgive me, dear friend.

You see, life has rewarded my persistence by returning me to happiness— infinite, incredible, wonderful happiness. And—well, I forgot all my doctors' warnings and threats. I forgot that my physical powers were so limited. The endless rush of people coming to me—League youngsters, famed workers from mines and factories, heroic builders of our happiness, coming to me because of *The Steel*—they fanned the flame within me, that I had thought was flickering out. Again I became an impassioned agitator and propagandist. Often and often, I forgot my place in the ranks, where duty calls me to work more by the pen than by word of mouth. And my treacherous health failed me once more. I suddenly found myself on the danger line. For a whole month, the doctors have been trying to stop this regression, pouring into me no end of all sorts of medicinal fluids. But so far they've not succeeded. I can only sigh at the thought that, not so long ago, I could work as much as 15 hours a day. Now, I can hardly manage three hours of listening to material on the Civil War in the Ukraine, plus a little work on the film script.

Thousands of letters, coming to me from all parts of the Union, call me on to battle—and I lie here, trying to put down the mutiny inside me. For all the danger, I won't die, of course, this time either—if only for the reason that I haven't yet fulfilled the task the Party has entrusted to me. It's my clear duty to finish *Born of the Storm*. And not simply to get the book written, but to set it ablaze with the fire of my own heart. Then, I must write

(or rather, help write) the film script of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Also, there's a book for children I must get written. *Pavka's Childhood*, I'll call it. And by all means a book about Pavka Korchagin's happiness. That's five years of work—of concentrated, Bolshevik effort. And that's the very minimum I can allow myself in my plans for life. You'll smile, I suppose. But it can't be any other way. The doctors smile, too—puzzled and embarrassed. But—duty above all else. And therefore I stand for five years as a minimum.

Tell me, Anna—where can you find a man so insane as to take leave of life in such a wonderful time as ours? Why, it would be treachery, betrayal of our country. I want to ask you a favour: call on the critics, in my name, to open Bolshevik fire on the first five chapters. Tell them not to fear hard words, if only they are needed. I can stand anything, and I must be told all there is to tell. I must know the truth. And set the example yourself. I'm your pupil and your friend. Criticize my work.

I press your hands:

I'd like to get back to Moscow this autumn. But it seems that isn't fated to come true.

Regards to all the comrades on the *Molodaya Gvardia*, to Mark and my dear Sonya.

Devotedly, *N. Ostrovsky*

TO G. I. PETROVSKY*

Sochi, September 15, 1935

My very dear Grigori Ivanovich,

Your wonderful letter has come. There are times when a man cannot find the words to express all he feels. But

* Grigori Ivanovich Petrovsky—at that time Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Ukrainian S.S.R. and Vice-Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R.

—I felt your warm, friendly hand, felt it near my heart. I have attained the greatest happiness that man can know. In spite of tremendous physical suffering, suffering that never leaves me for an instant, I wake up happy, joyous, and work the whole day through, for all the night that blinds my eyes. Life around me is bright with sun and colour. There can be no measure to my eagerness to fill the pages of my new book with all the flame and all the passion of my heart—to write a book that will rally the youth to the struggle, that will inspire them to selfless devotion to our great Party.

When letters come to me with the news that our country's Bolshevik youth, that the men of our Far Eastern forces, are asking the Government to award me the Order of Lenin—I think to myself that they don't know I've already received the very highest award of all, the approval of our leader, which brought me such a great flood of new energy. What could be dearer? I've kept the word I gave you when we met. The film script of *How the Steel Was Tempered* is ready. Comrades from the Ukrainian film studio have been here with me to discuss it. The film will be out by the middle of next year.

I press your hand.

Devotedly, *N. Ostrovsky*

The book you sent me has come—a volume of decisions of the Government of the Ukrainian S.S.R., with your autograph. Many thanks.

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, October 28, [1935]

My own dear Shurochka,

Received your letter, so warm and friendly. Yes, of course we'll meet in Moscow. I'm thinking of leaving here about November 10.

If you knew what a mad time I'm having. Not a free minute, from morning until late at night. So that you mustn't be angry with me, my dearest, for not writing. My Shurochka is always in my heart. But life is so swift, so full of happenings. No time for meals, almost. No time to be alone with one's own self.

I'll let you know my Moscow address in good time. Nothing new with us here. Warmest greetings to you from all the family.

I press your hands.

Kolya

TO I. P. FEDENEV

Sochi, November 6, 1935

Dear Innokenti Pavlovich,

It's late evening. Tomorrow we celebrate the eighteenth birthday of our beautiful Soviet land.

Warmest greetings to you, dear friend.

This anniversary is the happiest I have ever known. In these November days our Republic will fasten the Order of Lenin to my breast, over my happy heart. What a wonderful thing life is!

I embrace you warmly.

Hearty greetings from Mother and from my sister.

Your *Kolya*

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, December 2, 1935

Dear Anna Alexandrovna,

Your letter received. It's hard for me, just now, to put my thoughts and feelings into any semblance of order. Too much emotional strain. But, as they say, happiness doesn't kill. I'm occupied now with rallying, bit by tiny bit, the strength I spent so liberally in those days of celebration. I still hope we'll soon meet. And then I can tell you all about it.

Czechoslovakia—well, we'll wait and see what they make up their minds to do. Incidentally, I had Czechoslovakian visitors, the other day—a delegation that came to the U.S.S.R. for the November 7 celebrations. And didn't Mother talk her fill of Czech!

Mikhail Borisovich Zats has sent you the film script. We both request that you put off publication, if possible. It's still raw material. In another few days it will be really finished and polished up, and then we can publish with a clear conscience....

The *Molodaya Guardia*—that's a name I dearly love. It was the *Molodaya Guardia* that introduced me into the world of literature. And I'll never break the ties of affection that bind me to it so closely....

I plan to be in Moscow in about 8 or 10 days. I hope to get there safely.

The Red Army General Staff and the *History of the Civil War* editorial board have promised me every assistance in getting material on the war with the Polish Whites. That being so, I dare hope that my novel will be firmly based on documentary facts.

That's all for now.

Other things can wait to be talked over when we meet. That will be better than any letter.

Regards to all.

Your Kolya

TO M. B. ZATS*

Sochi, December 2, 1935

Good afternoon, Mishenka!

Both your letters received. Have written to Anna Karavayeva, asking her to hold up the script until it gets its final polishing.

* Mikhail Borisovich Zats—a scenarist at the Ukrainian film studio, who helped Ostrovsky in his work on the script of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

Wrote yesterday to the *Radyanske Kino* [Ukrainian: *Soviet Cinema*] magazine and to the Odessa Studio. Am waiting impatiently for the finished script. Send it in two copies. I plan to leave for Moscow in a few days.

By dint of determined struggle, I've finally won the doctors' "permit" to make the trip. At first they wouldn't hear of it. The fight was hard, but victory has come. "You'll die on the way," they keep telling me, even now. The railway is giving me a special car (saloon, they call it). All these last days have been an unforgettable time for me, as you will know. A great emotional strain, that took no little of my strength. But—happiness doesn't kill. And now I wear over my heart the portrait of him who led us in the storm....

Don't be angry that I don't write often. It's the circumstances that are to blame.

Remember how impatiently I'm waiting. Grab the first copies as soon as they come out of the typewriter, and send them off express. You wrote me so little about what the comrades at the studio thought of the second draft.

Write me huge letters, full of details. I enjoy reading them.

And write often, old fellow!

If it's only a few words—terse as a battle command.

My health? It's come out with flying colours after a tremendous endurance test.

The only danger now is the trip. If I don't hold out, I'll be disgraced!

No one will forgive me that.

And therefore I must be sure to arrive safely.

Regards from all the family, and from Alexandra Petrovna.

Your Nikolai

The studio needn't hurry about money. All's well in that respect. Prosperity!

TO KH. P. CHERNOKOZOV

Sochi, December 4, 1935

Dear Khrisanf Pavlovich,

The telegraph wires have brought me news from you. All these years, I hadn't been able to get in touch with you, my own dear "Dad."

And now those few words, so affectionate.... How glad I was to get them!

We've never for a minute forgotten you, neither my family nor I. Strong ties bind me always to you—splendid fighter in the Old Guard of Bolshevism.

Do you remember, dear friend, how you wrote to the C.C.: that O[strov]sky would be of use, yet, to the Party, that that young fellow wasn't burnt out yet, and wouldn't be? You believed as no one else did that I had still the power to create. And today I see, with pride, that I have justified your faith in me.

I know nothing of how life is treating you nowadays—don't know where you're working, even. How is your health? And so many other things I want to know! How are "Mother" and your dear Rosochka? You must write me about everything. You can't fail to. Though I know, of course, that you're not fond of writing, or rather, that you haven't the time for it. Let "Mother" do the writing. I'll mail you my book. If you've read the speech I made when I received the Order of Lenin, you should know that it means you, too, as an Old Bolshevik, one of my teachers.

My heart is full of creative aspiration, of the eager will to work.

Am planning to leave for Moscow soon, to study documentary materials on the Civil War. Then, in May, I'll come back here to Sochi and settle down in the new house the Government is building me.

If you come to Sochi next year, I can't imagine but that

you will be my guest, the very day you get here. And now I'll be waiting for your answer, dear, loved friend. Greetings to "Mother." I press your hands.

Your *Ostrovsky*

TO A. I. PUZYREVSKY

Sochi, December 4, 1935

Dear Sasha,

We both sin often and badly, so far as letter-writing's concerned. But only one thing matters—friendship. And that remains unshaken, regardless of the intervals between our letters.

The railway comrades brought me your letter. I've done all you ask in it. Am planning to shift to Moscow soon, and spend the winter there—working over archive materials, for my new novel.

In May I'll come back here to Sochi and settle down in my new house. It will be ready by then.

A dear and wonderful gift, this house, from the Ukrainian Government.

I've mailed you the "jubilee" issues of all the Sochi papers, to your address at the Regional Committee. Now all my thoughts centre on new progress, new achievement.

I must justify the great trust the Party has shown in me.

Write me from your new place of work, and send me your address there. Then I can send you some interesting bits from my new book.

You've been publishing my letters, you so-and-so! I'm afraid to write you any more! (That's a joke.)

Sasha, old fellow, Rosa Lyakhovich died not long ago. Hope to see you when summer comes. It's time you had a rest and repairs. Remember, Sasha—there's loads of

work ahead. You mustn't wear yourself to a state when you can't work any longer.

Regards to you from all the family.

I press your hands.

Your Kolya Ostrovsky

TO A. A. ZHIGAREVA

Sochi, December 5 [1935]

My own dear Shurochka,

I'm planning to leave for Moscow in another few days. Will work there till May, and then—back to Sochi again, to the new house that will be ready for me by spring....

It's my hope that the trip will come off safely, that the grim prophecies of friends and family will prove empty fears. They all declare I'll catch my death of cold on the train, and so on and so forth.

In Moscow I'll be able to study the Army archives, to help me in my new book—*Born of the Storm*. When summer comes, of course, I'll be expecting you in Sochi, to take the cure, and rest up, and visit with me in my new cottage. Hearty greetings to you from all the family.

I press your tiny hands.

Your Kolya

TO MARIA DEMCHENKO AND MARINA GNATENKO

Sochi, December 5, 1935

Dear girls, Maria and Marina,

I've read your friendly letter to me in the *Komsomolets Ukrainskii*. I tried to wire you a few heartfelt words of friendship, in those days of your triumph. But the Sochi telegraph clerks are not too good at geography, and they couldn't find the name of your village on their lists. Still, as you see, that hasn't spoiled our friendship.

Better than any official answer to your letter, I should like to press your hands in mine—your strong, young, calloused hands. (Are they calloused? I'm sure they must be. That "five hundred" wasn't raised without hard work!)

I'm leaving for Moscow in a few days, to work through the winter there on a new novel I'm writing—*Born of the Storm*.

And then, in the spring, when Sochi is all abloom, and the hot sun shines down caressingly, I'll come back here again, to live in the new house the Ukrainian Government is building for me. And that's when I invite you to come and stay a while with me, and rest, and bathe in the sea. It's fine, down here. And when you come, we can talk together of all the things we want to tell one another. I'd like Hanna Shvidko, too, the youngest of you all, to come with you.

Heroic little Hanna was born in the days when our generation was joining the Young Communist League. Yes, it was the Ukrainian Young Communist League that trained us all, that made us what we are.

Our country has fastened the Order of Lenin to our breasts. It is a matter of honour to us, now, to justify this great faith our revolutionary government has shown in us. And we will justify it. There can be no failing.

I embrace you, dear girls, my dear, fine friends.

N. Ostrovsky

TO THE YOUNG READERS OF THE Y.C.L. PAGE OF THE SOCHINSKAYA PRAVDA

Sochi, 1935

I should like to say a few words to my League comrades, readers of this page.

It is for you to make the League page of this paper read not only by yourselves, the League members, but by all the working-class youth. How is that to be done?

At every enterprise, at every building site, League members gather the young people, in free moments, to read aloud the youth page and discuss it.

The discussion must be made lively and interesting. This sort of work can, and will, help to draw the youth into the movement of worker correspondents. Young people need only to have their interest aroused, and they will quickly respond to the call to write about their needs and wishes.

And interest will be aroused, if the League page writes for the youth about all the things young people want to know.

For my part, I am willing to help in this interesting and useful work.

N. Ostrovsky

TO THE PRESIDIUM OF THE SOCHI TOWN SOVIET

Sochi, 1935

Dear comrades,

You have greatly honoured me by giving my name to the Sochi library for children and youth. It will make me very happy to help the library in its cultural growth. And as a first step in this direction, I have a great request to make to you: that you give the library suitable quarters. That is essential, if its work is to develop properly, real work for the training of the new generation.

I am profoundly convinced that you will take every measure to provide for this.

I press your hands, comrades.

With communist greetings,

N. Ostrovsky

I enclose a letter from the manager of the library, which I should like you to read at your meeting.

TO A. P. LAZAREVA*

Moscow, January 22, 1936

Dear Alexandra Petrovna,

... Am working hard. You were right. Moscow has met me kindly and given me all I was longing for. I'm enjoying my work tremendously, and if life didn't keep bringing up dozens of obstacles, great and small, if life were kinder to me and let my heart alone, I think my literary work would make great strides.

Don't let the style of this letter bother you. I'm dictating at a tremendous rate, and the typewriter sounds like a machine-gun in battle. So that stylistic flaws and other writers' sins will have to be forgiven.

Chapter 8 is finished. That's a jump, with 6 and 7 left undone. Anarchy? Yes. But I had the urge to do this chapter. Typed, it's 42 pages. And now I'm absorbed in Przygodski and his tragedy. He knows no happiness in his family life, this grim, and yet so tender-hearted fellow, this splendid fighter. Often, in battle and in time of strenuous marches, his thoughts turn to his loving friend, to buxom Franciszka. He recalls her caresses, her soft yielding, and his heart contracts with pain. No other woman can attract him. As yet, I've found no true conclusion to the situation for Przygodski and for Franciszka. It's a difficult problem for the artist to deal with. I think, I feel, that Przygodski can love no other woman; and yet, I find it very hard to believe that his love for Franciszka may blaze up again with the old ardour, and bring healing warmth into his life. But we shall see. It will all depend on whether he doesn't fall in battle. Knowing as you do what anxious, painful searchings this aspect of the novel has involved for me, you will understand why it

* Alexandra Petrovna Lazareva—Ostrovsky's secretary.—*Ed.*

continues to absorb so much of my attention. And it may seem queer, but I feel it all so keenly—as though Przygodski were a friend of mine, and a very dear one. Whereas, after all, he's only a character in a book I'm writing....

My life here is very quiet, secluded. I see no one but the people connected with my work. And my energy is spent quite nationally.

For tomorrow, there's a phonograph recording scheduled. I'm to read aloud two fragments from *The Steel*.

I press your hand.

N. Ostrovsky

TO ROMAIN ROLLAND

Moscow, January 29, 1936

I should like these words of mine to carry all the warmth and all the fire of our friendly feelings towards you.

Dear Romain Rolland! It was with tremendous emotion, several years ago, that I heard the ardent lines of your Manifesto. In those lines a fine and courageous man, a man of lofty culture, declared for all the world to hear whom he loved, and whom he hated.

It was to us that the love of Romain Rolland was dedicated—to us, sons of the working people, who have cast off the fetters of capitalism and devoted ourselves to honest and unflagging labour to build up our country, new and beautiful. It was to us this love was dedicated—to us, true masters of the land, preservers of culture, creators of the new culture of the liberated people. And your words of hatred, of indignation—they were flung in the face of man's enemies, in the face of fascism, of the bourgeoisie.

This was the Manifesto of a fighter, prepared for battle. Your name, in our country, is known as the name of a friend of all oppressed humanity.

I press your hands, dear friend of ours. And, in the name of our young fighters and builders, sons of the working class, I send you heartfelt congratulations and best wishes on your seventieth birthday. We know well that Romain Rolland is not only a great artist, but a man of tremendous courage, a man whose honest gaze has perceived truth.

May your voice ever sound, with unabating fervour, calling men on to struggle for the liberation of humankind.

Your *Nikolai Ostrovsky*

TO A. P. LAZAREVA

Moscow, March 7, 1936

Dear Alexandra Petrovna,

Eighth-of-March greetings! On International Women's Day, tomorrow, I shall demonstrate my friendship and respect for the great sex by getting for the first time into my uniform as a Red Army commissar. Let the feminine majority in our household see me as what I am—a fighter, a still not entirely demobilized partisan. Let their eyes be confronted by my red stars and gilt buttons, by the honorary insignia on my collar, and all the rest of those captivating traps for the heart of beauty. And don't you laugh!

I've no great store of good news. You'll know, from the newspapers, about the article by Kravchenko. Well, and then—Averbakh has been to see my eyes. He urgently advises me to have my right eye out. So that, as you can see, not all my ordeals are over. And life will bring me many another such bitter pill. That seems to be my profession, really—losing bit after bit of my physical

being. The only good side of it is that these physical losses are recompensed a hundred times over by the spiritual wealth that comes of my creative work—so that I'm never the loser. No, life can't rob me. That's beyond its power. My book is being translated into Dutch, Czech, Greek, and Bulgarian. Discussion in England and France on its publication there is drawing to completion. Publication is proposed in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

I press your hand.

N. Ostrovsky

TO HIS MOTHER

Moscow, March 26, 1936

Mother, dear,

All your letters have been read to me. I'm so glad I was able to give you a little pleasure. Now, I want to have a serious talk with you. I beg of you, my dearest, with all my heart—I demand of you, that you give up all heavy work. I repeat—absolutely all heavy work. You never do as we ask in that respect, I know. You always do as you see fit—in other words, keep on from morning to night at your exhausting, thankless household labour. But your health is altogether ruined now, and things can't go on this way any longer. In a day or two I'll be able to send you a thousand rubles. I'll send it by wire. With this money, I want you to buy better food for all the family, to buy yourself everything you need. This money is meant only for better food. And—find someone to help you. Moving will mean so much work.... See you do as I'm asking you, dearest Mother! We'll soon be there with you. Only a few days left. A car and a piano will soon arrive at the new house. Don't unpack the boxes of books I've sent. It will be easier to move them as they are. And then, when I get there, we can begin to put the library

in order. Take care of yourself—that's the main thing. Nothing else matters, compared with your health.

And, Mother dear, what do you think about a sanatorium? Wouldn't that be the best thing for you? If you'd like to go, wire me, and I'll see to it right off. Think it over and let me know. I'll do just as you say. Yes, and write me what you'd like me to bring you, when I come. Be good and tell me.

I press you to my heart, dear, hard-working Mother of mine.

Your Kolya

TO A READER, M. P. YEGOROVA

Sochi, June 16, 1936

Dear Maria Pavlovna,

I've received your letter. It's not easy for me to answer you. There are times when all words of consolation are powerless to ease a person's pain and suffering. And that is often so when the pain comes of a wound to the very heart, dealt by one most dearly loved of all. I can't write you stock words of comfort. I can say only this: that I too, in life, have tasted the bitterness of perfidy, of treachery. But one thing saved me, and only one. I had always an aim in life, a reason and justification for living: the struggle for Socialism. That is the most lofty of all loves. Whereas, if purely personal affairs loom huge in a man's interests, and public affairs take only the tiniest space in his mind—why, then debacle in his private life is very near to catastrophe. Then the question arises in his mind: why go on living? What for? The fighter will never be confronted with that question. The fighter too, of course, will suffer deeply at any betrayal by those he loves. But, always, what remains to him will be greater and finer far than all that he has lost.

See how beautiful our life has grown! How fascinat-

ing the struggle to renew our land, and make it flourish—the struggle to remake man! Devote your life to this, and the sun will shine for you once more.

N. Ostrovsky

TO G. I. AND D. F. PETROVSKY

Sochi, July 1, 1936

Dear Grigori Ivanovich and Dominica Fyodorovna,

Forgive me for not writing. The only reason for it, believe me, was my reluctance to bother you. There's nothing worse than people who won't let you alone. . . .

I spend my days out on an open balcony. A fresh breeze blows from the sea, warm and caressing. I gulp the sea air—can't get my fill of it! It's fine here, in my new home. Even a nightingale, singing away every morning. It perches on a pine branch near my window and sings so beautifully, I can't help but listen. A little too early, though—at 5 o'clock, when I ought to be asleep.

I'm working, but not too hard. Am taking your advice. To be really truthful, I must admit I simply haven't the vigour to work strenuously. In another month, I hope to finish the first book of *Born of the Storm*.

Will send you the manuscript. If you have the time, read it through and write me your impressions.

And spare me no hard words.

My heart is very heavy. The death of Gorky was a cruel blow to me. It's robbed me of sleep and rest. Only with his death has it come home to us how dear, how close he was to all of us, and how great our loss will be. Yes, we're orphaned without him. My thoughts are centred, now, on the responsibility that falls on us—the younger writers, only now entering into literature. My heart is

very heavy. The sadness does not lift. Lahuti told me the day before yesterday that when he stopped with Gorky at the end of April he saw him working on an article about *How the Steel Was Tempered*. What Gorky thought of the book, I do not know. It remains a part of his literary heritage, this article—so dear to me, so badly needed in my work.

However severely the great master may have criticized me, his article is the dearest, the most vital document to my development, to my improvement.

We'll be waiting for your coming—all my family, and I. Come soon, dear friends.

I press your hands.

Devotedly, *N. Ostrovsky*

TO HIS WIFE

Sochi, August 9, 1936

Dear Raya,

... Forgive these short notes, Raya mine, and don't worry if I don't write at all for a few days—until the 18th, perhaps.

The work is at its hottest just now. The last pages of the book are in the writing. And the whole book in the process of editing. A. P.* and all the rest are working in two shifts. The house is full of typists. I keep hurrying them all, as usual, and I suppose they're waiting impatiently for the day when this crazy fellow quiets down.

To top it all, I've heard rumours that the Party Committee will soon order me to take a rest, and so I'm hurrying to finish the book before that order comes, inasmuch as I haven't the right to disobey it....

I press your hand....

Write me often, at length, about everything.

Nikolai

* A. P.—Alexandra Petrovna Lazareva.

TO V. P. STAVSKY*.

Sochi, August 17, 1936

Dear Comrade Vladimir,

Simultaneously with this letter I am sending you by air mail the manuscript of the first book of *Born of the Storm*. I've only one request—that you read it as quickly as possible, and the other comrades too, and let me know your unembellished and unbiased opinion. Will be waiting impatiently to hear from you.

Your letter received. Will be in Moscow at the end of October.

I press your hands.

Regards to all.

N. Ostrovsky

TELEGRAM. August 21, 1936

To Mikhail Sholokhov,
Vyoshenskaya

Your friendly letters received. Finished my book today. Will write you when rested. We will soon meet. Regards to Comrades Lida and Maria.

Your Nikolai

TELEGRAM. August 25, 1936

To R. P. Ostrovskaya

Congratulations on matriculation at Sverdlov University. Good for you. Sent you manuscript by a comrade on August 23. Confirm receipt.

Nikolai

* Vladimir Petrovich Stavsky (1900-1943)—a Soviet writer.—Ed.

TO MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV

Sochi, August 28, 1936

Dear Comrade Misha,

My first question is—when are you coming down here to Sochi, with your family? Summer is on the wane. Dreary autumn days have already burst in on us, unasked, making everything cold and wet. She'll be routed, of course—that old maid, autumn—and we'll have summer back for another month or so. But don't you stay home, waiting. Get on your way, just as fast as you can.

Remember, Misha—I'm not to be depended on, so far as longevity's concerned. And if you want to press my hand, come now. Don't put it off until next year.

I'm stubborn, of course, like a true Ukrainian, and I'll hold on to the very last. But still—don't be too confident. I'm giving you fair warning, so you won't be able to say, "That Nikolai! How he let me down!"

Enough of preliminaries....

I'd like to send you the manuscript of *Born of the Storm*, but on one condition—that you read it through and tell me what you think of it. And tell me honestly. If you don't like it, let the brickbats fly! "Neither bitter nor sweet"—that sort of thing. "Slush, that's all, as they put it in the 'twenties." Yes, Misha, I'm searching hard for an honest comrade, for someone willing to hit out frankly. Our own fraternity—the writers—have lost the habit of speaking from the heart. And friends—friends are afraid of hurting a person's feelings. And that's very bad. Praise only spoils a man. Even strong characters are liable to be led astray, if people praise them beyond all measure.

Real friends should tell the truth, however painful it may be. And they should write more about shortcomings than about what has been done well. What is well done, the people won't condemn.

So that, Misha, you just give that manuscript what for. Remember this, Misha: I'm a stoker by trade, and I was no bad hand at feeding furnaces. But—well, I'm rather a "worse" hand at literature. That's a trade that calls for talent. And "what a man's not given 'from above,' he won't find to buy in the shops," says an old Czech proverb.

So you see how it is, old Misha-bear out in Vyoshenskaya!

And now, won't you tell me what to do to drag you out of that den of yours in Vyoshenskaya? You're not to be moved, I see, without the help of Comrades Maria and Lida....

I leave for Moscow on October 23, and stay there all winter.

Forget your "weight of years," Mishenka, and come straight down. And if you don't think of coming, why, say so.

I press your paw. Regards to Comrades Maria and L., and a warm hug for the little daughter.

Your *N. Ostrovsky*

TELEGRAM. August 29, 1936

To Alexei Stakhanov

Your friendly telegram received. Deeply moved. Accept my brotherly greetings. I press your manly, work-calloused hands.

Nikolai Ostrovsky

TO THE CENTRAL IRMINO MINE NEWSPAPER*

To the heroic miners of the Central Irmino Pit

Sochi, August 30, 1936

I want you to feel the firm pressure of my hand, my brotherly greetings.

Most devotedly,

Nikolai Ostrovsky

TO A. A. KARAVAYEVA

Sochi, September 1, 1936

Good day to you, Anna Alexandrovna!

I mailed Chapter Six of *Born of the Storm* to the magazine yesterday. A huge chapter—124 typewritten pages. Almost six signatures.

I sent it simply so that you might publish it, if you find fit. I don't insist on publication, of course—not in the least. It's just that I've finished the first book and send you now that part of it that has not been published in the magazine, for you to do with as you see fit.

I'm not at all well. I've been ordered to take six weeks off. This letter is rather dull. Forgive it.

Received *The Steel* in Japanese, yesterday. Put out in Tokyo by the Science Publishers. Hieroglyphs, so that we can't even guess at a word of it.

The Steel is coming out now in the following countries: England, France (Editions sociales internationales), Holland, Czechoslovakia, and Japan. In New York, *The Steel* is appearing serially in a daily newspaper.

I plan to leave for Moscow on October 25. Will start work immediately on the second book. I've already collected the material I'll need. If only my health doesn't let me down—curse it!

* Greetings on the anniversary of the birth of the Stakhanovite movement.—Ed.

As you probably know, I almost died, a couple of months ago. A gallstone cut through, resulting in haemorrhage and bile poisoning. All the doctors chorussed, "That's the end of it!"

But they were wrong again. I scrambled out of it somehow—crashing all the axioms of medicine. Well, anyone can make a mistake, I suppose, as the saying goes....

I've sent the manuscript of *Born of the Storm* to a number of prominent comrades, for appraisal. If they say the book is worth printing, well and good. If not, I'll put it away. I've no desire to come out with a dull, uninteresting piece of work.

What loathing fills my heart as I read about Serebryakova, Selivanovsky, and the other beasts and traitors that have been brought to light among our literary circles!

Regards to all our comrades.

N. Ostrovsky

TO HIS WIFE

Sochi, September 14, 1936

Dearest Raya,

Received two letters from you simultaneously, one of them enclosing a list of books.

No particular news here. Tomorrow we mail you two boxes of books, for your own shelves.

Had a visit—our heroic airmen.* The weather is cold, and I keep indoors. My health is satisfactory. All the family are ill, particularly Mother. Lev took sick at Krasnaya Polyana, and was brought here in a very bad state. He's in bed. Fedenev and Bronislawa Marchlewska are taking the cure here in Sochi.

I spend my time putting my literary affairs in order, reading, and writing all sorts of letters.

* The famed Soviet flyers Chkalov, Belyakov, and Baidukov.—Ed.

I do wish you would finally take up music. Find a teacher, and get to work.

Be your cheerful, energetic self. And study. Don't let all sorts of trifles bother you. The point is, to take the main fort by storm. And all the rest is minor.

I'm very glad you're getting down to systematic study, after all these years. All those amateur methods were just a strain on your nerves.

Best wishes.

If nothing goes wrong, we set out on October 25 for a new Northern Expedition—to Moscow.

Nikolai

P.S. Let me know at what time of the day it's most convenient to telephone you.

TELEGRAM. October 11, 1936

To Alexander Fadeyev,
Soviet Writers' Union,
52, Vorovsky Street, Moscow

Dear Comrade Alexander. Ask Stavsky for MS of first book of *Born of the Storm*. Read it through. I arrive in Moscow October 24. We must get together to discuss in friendly fashion all my novel's shortcomings.

Accept my embrace.

Your *Nikolai Ostrovsky*

TELEGRAM. October 14, 1936

To Stavsky and Lahuti,*
Soviet Writers' Union,
52, Vorovsky Street, Moscow

Plan to arrive in Moscow October 24. Earnestly request you to prepare for discussion of *Born of the Storm*

* Abul Kossim Lahuti--a Tajik Soviet poet.—Ed.

by presidium of board of Writers' Union, jointly with *Pravda*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and Youth League C.C., to take place at my home in Moscow shortly after my arrival.

Communist greetings.

Your *Nikolai Ostrovsky*

TELEGRAM. October 14, 1936

To Karavayeva and Kolosov,
Molodaya Gvardia magazine,
Novaya Ploshchad, Moscow

Dear friends, I would like you to prepare for discussion of *Born of the Storm* at session of presidium of board of Soviet Writers' Union, at my home in Moscow. I plan to arrive October 24.

Your *Nikolai*

TO HIS MOTHER

Moscow, December 14, 1936

Dearest Mother, I finished today all that remained to be done on the first book of *Born of the Storm*. So that I've kept my word to the League Central Committee—to finish the book by December 15.

Worked "three shifts" all the past month. Wore out all my secretaries terribly. Made them work from morning until far into the night, with no days off. Poor girls! I don't know what they think of me, but I certainly treated them cruelly.

That's over now, though. I'm more tired than I can say. But the book is done, and it will be out three weeks from now—150,000 copies, in a paper-backed edition. Later, it will come out at several publishing houses, in a total of something like half a million copies.

... I suppose you've read of André Gide's treachery. How he fooled our hearts! Who could ever have thought,

Mother, that he could act so basely, so dishonestly? May he live to feel ashamed, old man that he is, for the way he's acted! It wasn't only you and me he fooled—it was our whole people. And now his book—*Return from Russia*, he calls it—will be a tool for all our enemies to use against Socialism, against the working class. Of me personally, he writes "well" in this book. If I lived in Europe, he says, I'd be regarded as a "saint," and all that sort of thing.

But no more of that. His treachery is a heavy blow to me, because I so sincerely believed his talk, and his tears, and the enthusiasm he seemed to show for all our victories and achievements, while he was here.

Now I've a month of rest ahead. I'll work very little—if I can hold out such idleness, of course. You and I are much alike that way—aren't we, Mother? Still, I'll make myself rest. I can read, and listen to music, and get some sleep. Six hours doesn't seem to be enough.

Did you hear our leader's speech at the Eighth Congress of Soviets? Is our radio working properly?

Forgive me, Mother dearest, for not writing, these past weeks. I never forget you. Take care of yourself, and keep up your spirits. The winter months will soon be over, and with the spring I'll be back with you again. I press your hands, your honest, hard-working hands, and embrace you tenderly.

Your N. Ostrovsky